

INITIATES *of the Art*



The Apprentices Handbook for Mage: The Ascension®

INITIATES *of the Art*



By Lynn Davis and Lindsay Woodcock



Prelude

By Kathleen Ryan



Amanda-readers: The Powers That Be have drafted me to write Vampire books, namely, Clan Novels Setite and Ravnos. This is leaving me about as much free time as gold bullion (I have none of either) and keeping me from my native stomping grounds, namely, Mage stuff. Fortunately, when Jess said, "Write me an apprentice piece," I had something ready for the Cerberus Chronicle. Unfortunately, it's a section from chapter two of the (as yet unscheduled) first novel in the series — which is a little behind the times. What follows fits into the timeline after Book of Shadows, but before Book of Madness.

Newcomers: I'm sorry if I've just confused you to death. You don't need to know any of the above to "get" this piece; it's just the Prelude. I hope you enjoy it.

—Kathleen Ryan

March 18, 1994
The Euthanatos Chantry
Cerberus

Julia Stanislaufsky sits cross-legged beneath the dusty-green leaves of a willow tree. The heel of her right sandal brushes the sandy dirt in a raised bed. The toes of her left foot dangle over the pavement on the other side. Her skirt drapes crookedly across both sides of the planter wall, and her light blouse flutters in the desert breeze.

Her hands cup a lit candle of raw beeswax. Its tiny flame flares to her will, and changes color under her direction—yellow to white, white to blue, blue to violet.

"Good job, Jules," says her teacher, sincerely. From her seat among the knobby roots of the willow, Mitzi Zimmerman watches the dancing fire carefully. "You did your homework."

Her apprentice bites down a pleased smile.

"Can you take it any farther?"

Julia nods. Her brow furrows in concentration, and the flame disappears — invisible to the eye, yet still lit, consuming its source at a terrible rate. Heat radiates from the base of the wick, and she has to hold the taper away to keep her face from the blaze.

"Snuff it and take five. You've done very well."

The fire dies instantly. Julia gingerly replaces the candle in its holder with a nervous eye on the near-boiling wax at its peak. She stretches, stands up, and walks a few yards out into the courtyard. Unconsciously, her feet begin to twitch out a dance — heel and toe, heel and skip. When she notices, she swings her arms, too, and rubs her shoulders as if to ward away a chill. But the cool of night is fading quickly, and when she turns back to her teacher, knowing eyes there tell her she is not fooling anyone.

Julia smiles sheepishly, and the wide grin she swallowed during Mitzi's praise takes over. She lets it loose and laughs — the light on her limbs feels good, the clean air of Cerberus tastes like nothing left on Earth, and this morning, at least, she knows all her lessons. Why not dance? She picks up her skirt and gives her teacher a few more steps — a polka, she thinks, though no one could possibly recognize her wild hops and kicks as such — and Mitzi laughs, too.

That's nice to see, thinks Julia, watching the older woman smile. She's hardly ever really happy about anything these days... I wonder why I thought that? She isn't unhappy, is she? She doesn't look or sound different... Julia scrutinizes her mentor with a solicitous eye: An elegant woman, wearing a straight-cut, unbleached linen dress, which Julia enviously knows will be unstained by the willow bark when Mitzi stands. She is thin, but not tall enough to be slender. She looks too fragile, Julia realizes, has she always looked like that?

The sun clears the building behind the apprentice and floods the courtyard. It turns Mitzi's mouse-brown, frizzy hair to gold and her dress to white — but her eyes, the color of autumn oak leaves, do not brighten with the sun. She has already stopped laughing, and the shadows of the willow branches screen her from the light.

A chuckle falls from one of the dormitory windows above them. Another student — a young man from Java — draws his curtains and waves down at Julia, and the dance bashfully abandons her feet. He waters the flowers in his windowbox, looks off to the southwest, and disappears again.



Julia's gaze flickers to her own little garden, a patch of red geraniums outside blue-and-white striped drapes on the third floor, and then to the same spot her fellow looked to: a distant shadow on the chantry's outer wall, a balcony with shuttered doors that lead to a room with no windows. Every apprentice on Cerberus has developed the habit of looking up at that balcony whenever they step outside. Some have even begun to wonder why so many of their teachers do the same thing.

Julia sits down in the shade of the tree, out of sight of the students' quarters, and starts fishing:

"Mitz?"

"Yes?"

"Why are we practicing out here?"

"It's a nice day, isn't it?"

Julia waits, hoping for more.

"Senex should be back today," Mitzi goes on. "I thought we'd meet him."

"I thought you said they'd finished four days ago."

"They did. California's a long way away, you know."

"Isn't that," says the apprentice carefully, "awfully slow, though?"

Mitzi sips coffee from a tall blue mug beside her and feels out the direction of the conversation.

"Not all of them were strong or skilled enough to simply walk here from Sacramento." During a slow, significant pause, she studies Julia. "You know, you'll get farther with me by asking the real question..."

Julia's eyes flicker to her teacher's, and her protest dies on her lips.

"All right. Why does Amanda get so much special treatment?"

"What special treatment?"

Julia hesitates. So much talk has been going around the college that she has not expected to have to explain herself. She is a new enough pupil to show her sudden doubts in her face, but smart enough to have them. She proceeds more slowly.

"Well, first off, her room isn't with everyone else's."

"She's under quarantine."

"What?"

"Among other things, you're welcome to look at the scorch marks on her bedroom walls. She's had trouble controlling her powers."

"She has private lessons with Senex."

"She is his student, not a general member of the college. Do people ask why you have private lessons with me?"

"Okay," Julia continues, "but why did she get to go on this mission? There are lots of us who've been here longer than she has, and it just doesn't seem... fair."

"Julia! You don't think I'd let him risk *you* like that!"

"What?"

"Amanda's assignment wasn't a privilege. It wasn't a reward or a favor." Mitzi leans back against the gnarled tree trunk. "It isn't my policy to discuss other mages' apprentices, but this once I'll make an exception. Amanda was chosen because she was both the most expendable person available *and* the most likely to survive." She looks toward the distant sun and closes her eyes. "There is also the fact, which I would like you to think about very seriously, that Amanda is already a killer."

Julia considers this statement gravely.

"And you don't think I could do it?"

"Do you want to?"

Julia turns away.

She wanders farther and leans over the courtyard's central pool.

The fountain here is modest. One spring murmurs off-center, barely below the surface of the water. It shimmers. It wastes no water on spray or ornament. It wastes no stone on bowls, no metal on statues. The polished, gray marble basin is plain, but in the courtyard of Cerberus, it is beautiful — dark, austere, and cool relief from the sun-washed sandstone pavement.

The day sky, so far from the Earth and Sun, is deep violet. In the wavering mirror water, cloudless indigo frames the apprentice's reflection. She grimaces at her bodiless, dark brown hair — her pale eyes of no satisfactory color — not a pretty blue, not a mysterious green, not a stern gray. Her skin is red in the least attractive places, white over her prominent bones, unpleasantly purple in shadows beneath her eyes, sallow all over. Julia dabbles her hands in the pool to dispel the truthful illusion; she knows well enough that she is... ordinary-looking. She splashes her forearms and wets down the hair behind her ears to tame it. She sips a handful of sweet water and flicks the clinging droplets onto her face.

A sparrow flutters unexpectedly past her and flutters to a perch on the side of the fountain farthest from the girl. She freezes so as to not scare him away. The little bird cocks his eye at her, warily, suspiciously, and jerks his head around. He looks at her first from one jet-black bead, then the other, as if to say, "I know you're up to something. Don't think I don't. And if I could just see you straight, I'd be able to tell what it was. Then we'd find out who was who, missy."

He nabs a drink from the pool and watches her again. He drinks a bit more and hops to the left. At last, the sparrow catches her breathing. He tips his beak up in indignation, sneaks one last sip, and flies off.

"Ready?"

"Yeah."

"Enough candles. Here." Mitzi sets a canvas-wrapped bundle before her student. "Go ahead and open it."

Inside the bundle is a very old, very beautiful hourglass. The casework is richly polished boxwood, and it gleams like satin. The bulbs are thick, hand-blown, seamless glass — slightly uneven, rippled by sheer age and gravity. Julia explores the surfaces, for she is fascinated. Her teacher takes the canvas, folds it, and drapes it across the stone between them. She reaches for the glass, and her student hands it solemnly back.

Mitzi flips the glass.

Sand begins to pour through. Though the glass is large and heavy, the neck is wide and the bottom bulb fills faster than Julia had expected.

Mitzi watches it in perfect silence, and Julia tries to follow her example — tries to pull the most out of the experience, even though she can't yet see the point. Perhaps beneath the surface... she attempts to plumb the depths of the hourglass philosophically, physically, spiritually, symbolically... the meditation runs through time and death and age, winds into circles, and loses itself in cliché.

She rouses herself from the dreck and looks intently into the glass once more. Her attention wavers. The wind picks up the willow tree's branches and whips them to a frenzy overhead. It turns over dry leaves in the dirt beside them and rattles them along the bed, over the wall, and into the courtyard to play in the corners. Julia pries her legs out of lotus position and tucks them beneath her. The sand flows on... *out of the past bulb*, she thinks, *into the future bulb... perhaps that's the point*. Curiosity drives her to look up at Mitzi's face. Her teacher's expressionless eyes meet hers and return to the glass. Julia tries to force her way back into the meditation, but she lacks focus.

Voices of other students drift down from the buildings around them... snatches of conversation, incantations, songs... she hears even the drone of the honeybees among the geraniums in the dormitory windows. A little red bug starts his way up the slopes of the boxwood... Julia watches it with weary, sluggish mind. Her posture slumps, her legs stretch a little, and pins and needles begin to torment her ankles, knees and toes.

The last grain bounces down from the top bulb. To Julia, it seems almost impossible that anything else has ever happened, or that the ordeal could actually end.

Mitzi Zimmerman, fresh as ever, says, "Left to itself, this hourglass measures ten minutes exactly."

Only ten minutes... thinks Julia.

Mitzi catches the girl's glance. "You are going to stop it," she orders intently.

And to Julia's dismay, she flips it then and there.

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To **Phil** "Porthos Fitz-Empress, Jennifer Rollins, Dante, Bitch Queen Vannoy, Dr. Volcano...and you" **Brucato**. You built a fantasy so vivid that it could not be imagined, only lived. You guided us through five years of enlightenment and awakening. You made magick real. For that... thank you. I miss you. We all miss you.



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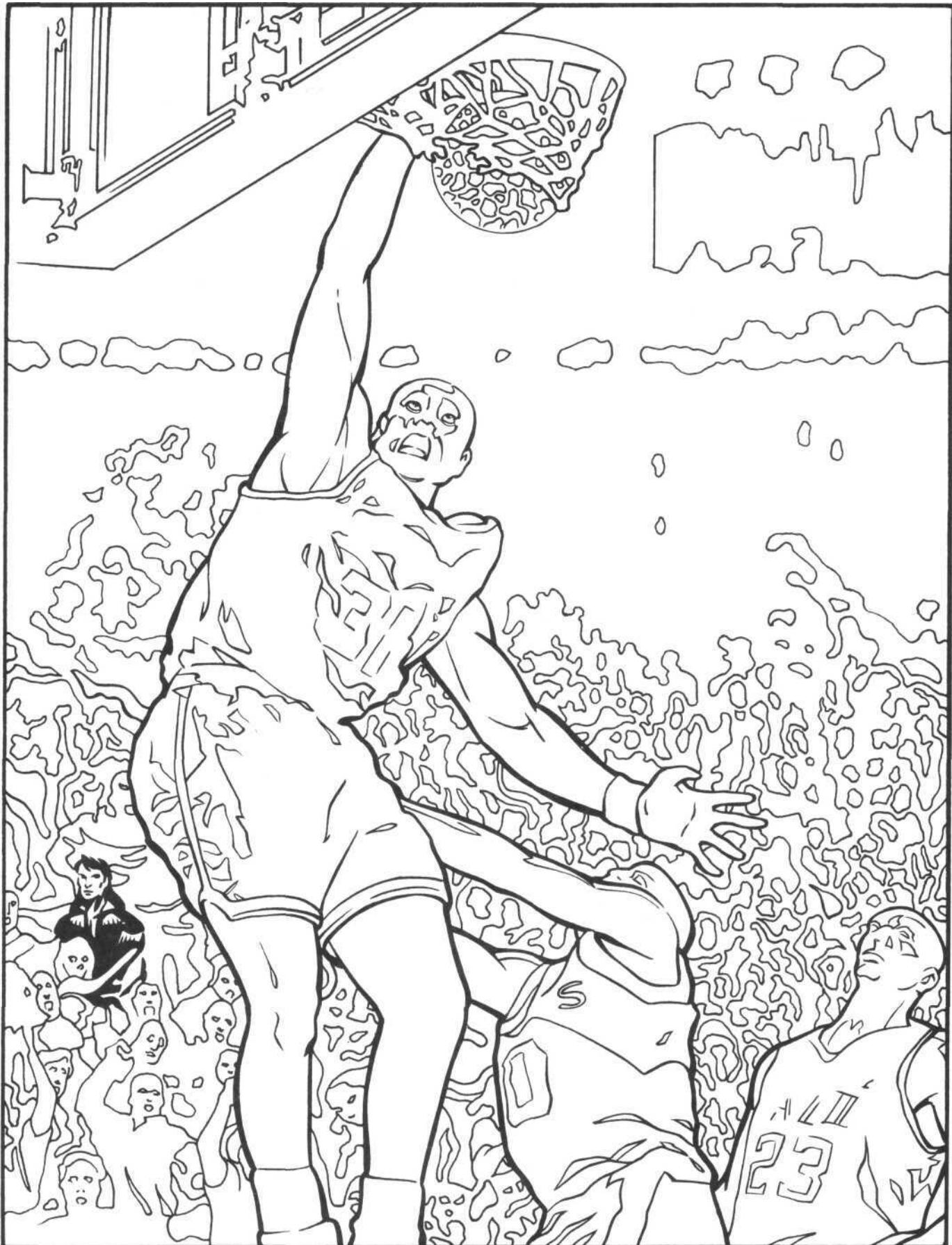
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Introduction



Nate watched them as they came in, one by one. Nice enough folks, he figured. He had them pegged for alumni from one of the local universities. He had never bothered to ask, instead opting to let his own imagination fill in. Nate fancied himself a writer, and these people had a story.

They met like this about once a month or so, sometimes longer, though there was a time a couple of years ago when he saw none of them for almost nine months. They were faithful to the meetings, and greeted each other like they were closest offfriends. Two of them he was sure were married by now, and two had either moved on, or died.

They nodded to Nate as they came in, and he served up their normal drinks and appetizers. He afforded them all the privacy they needed, giving them use of one of the back rooms, and waiting on them personally, so that none of the waitstaff would get nosy. That nosiness was bad for business, and while they sat and talked for hours on end, they were good for business. They paid well for Nate's time, and they even allowed a picture for an ad once, though you could not make out their faces very well. It didn't matter. It was the atmosphere he needed, not the faces.

Sir Lawrence White smiled to Nate as he walked into the room. He could sense the little Irishman's turn of thought, and he was amused. Lawrence liked Nate, and though he felt guilty for being able to glean his thoughts with a simple glance, it was

refreshing to feel impressions that were so... good. Nate was a simple man, with a simple life, who took pleasure out of daydreaming of other people's lives. Lawrence envied him.

The others were there already, seated and waiting. Lawrence smiled at them as he took his own seat. Around him were Jessa, still sporting her short tops and longskirts (he was glad to see she'd left the gothic scene at last, since it really was never her), her long black hair pulled back in a ponytail. Ryan, typing away at his laptop like a madman, looked up occasionally to acknowledge whomever was speaking. Lee Ann, who sat patiently beside him, talked from person to person, hardly betraying the permanent daze that she was truly in. Dent, who had taken to being quiet and reflective, was trying to ignore Lee Ann's ceaseless chatter. And Marcus sat nervously rigid with his hands clasped over a NASA folder.

Lawrence sat down and looked at everyone. Lee Ann quieted down as he prepared to speak. The silence was almost reverential, and Lawrence would have been touched, except that he could hear Lee Ann faintly humming "All Hail the Leader" under her breath. He decided to break the momentary tension with a smile.

Jessa coughed softly to catch Lee Ann's attention. Lee Ann looked at the other girl with a smile, still humming. Lawrence stifled a laugh and watched as Jessa first became angry, then simply sighed. It seemed that the Hollow One had finally

learned. Lee Ann would do as she would — it was how she'd always been.

"What are we here for?" Dent asked. Lee Ann jumped, clearly not expecting the silent man to speak. In truth, no one expected him to. Dent was a man offew words and rarely spoke unless spoken to.

"We always meet," Lee Ann said. "We get together and talk about the weather, and wonder what things would be like if we all had lives."

Ryan smiled a bit at that. Sir Lawrence could not help but note that the young man was beginning to develop something a little more like a sense of humor — at least, a normal one.

"Yes, but he has an agenda this time," Dent said, turning his attention to Sir Lawrence.

Lawrence smiled even more broadly, a hint of his teeth giving him a predatorial cast.

"An agenda? Perhaps I have. Perhaps I have since we met," he said.

Everyone turned their attention to him. He stood, holding a small book in his hands.

"I have an agenda," he said, looking to each of his friends. He laid the book down on the table. "And this is it."

How to Use This Book

I find that if I sit and attempt to explain the role of an apprentice to a new initiate, that I become a man of few words. It is not that I have no idea what I'm talking about, I just have trouble articulating the thought. I always feel I'm leaving something out. I am forgetting that one important detail, and leaving it out will get someone killed.

Difficult, to be true. That is why I've put this together. It is simply what I've named it. It is a book for apprentices about apprenticeship. It is also for the rest of you blokes who think you know it all. Believe me, you don't. You may say you don't need this book, but we'll see when you find yourself alone in a dark alley, staring down a frightened boy who just killed 20 people because he Awakened to a world more nightmarish than his Sleeping existence. You may be past this, but there are many who are not.

Well, since I have the chance to edit my words, what is apprenticeship? To be simple, it is placing oneself under the tutelage of another to learn his craft. For those such as us, the craft is magic, and it is a tricky one. It is also a rewarding and even entertaining craft. Couching it in such terms, I feel like a salesman.

There is nothing to sell here, though. Either you are a mage or you aren't. Ideally, everyone may Awaken. Unfortunately, most peoples' Avatars are simply too weak to muster the energy to Awaken. Sometimes even those that do aren't strong enough to channel the energies that fuel our magics. In a perfect world, everyone could be a mage, but the power for such an Awakening would be incredible.

We call that mass Awakening the Ascension, and it is what we strive for... well, in the big picture. Honestly, we just try to make our own little worlds better. Many of us can improve things around us, but it is the rare magus who changes the world. What irks idealists the most is that there are many powerful mages who could alter the universe, but don't. That's the chance we take, and the price the world pays.

So, you think it would be confusing if everyone in the world could do what you do? Well, you have to understand something: Magic is not what you think it is. It isn't spells, though you will use them at first. One day you will find that you don't need spells, or baubles, or anything else. One day the magic simply flows through you, obedient to your will. That is what we want for the world: for all to open their eyes and Awaken to what is around them. It would be a world of unlimited potential and opportunity.

Well, you've Awakened. It's fairly likely that if you have this book, you have a mentor. Trust me, that can be a blessing and a curse. Mentors can be good for learning and for getting you out of trouble. They are also a constant source of chores, ceaseless studies, tedious tasks, and dangerous missions. I cannot count the number of times I have seen mentors send young mages out to suicide. It is sometimes disheartening. Still, if you do not yet have a mentor, I suggest finding one. Of course, such a luminary might find you instead.

Once you get the mentor, you get shown the ropes. Try to have fun — it is not easy being a new mage. Everyone will be watching, all of them will test you, and some will wait for you to fail. If you are good enough (lucky enough, as some would say) to succeed, then congratulations.

I do not, however, take the congratulations with too many smiles. Magic bears a heavy price that few realize. You may have to give up some of the things you love most. You will be forced to make hard decisions, and sometimes feel as if you've sold your soul. It is never easy. To make it worse, you will not always know whom to trust. Not everyone who comes to help you is honest, sincere, or out for the betterment of yourself and the world. You thought otherwise? Magic does not make one infallible or moral, simply Aware. When you choose your friends — allies, circle mates, lovers, a mentor (or students, for that matter), then you had best be sure of them. If not, you might find yourself in worse trouble than you could imagine.

Now, the time for introduction is past. Read well the words herein, for they may well save your life.

Mood: The Unexplored World

To an initiate, everything is *brand new* once more. The mundane world is washed away in a sudden flash of brilliance that brings a wider, harsher and more vibrant plane into view. Once you've accepted magic, you can't go back: The world is always waiting around the corner now.

that you've changed. An apprentice had better look around those corners if he's to figure out how to survive in the suddenly dangerous realm of magic. Just around the bend are things more terrifying than any mortal could ever imagine... but each step brings the initiate closer to true understanding. If the world doesn't break you, you may live to see enough of it. Enough for what? Good question....

Theme: The Journey to Discovery

Watch that first step — it's a doozy.

Every action that an initiate takes opens up a hundred doorways. More often than not, the failings that drive a mage to corruption, insanity or death can be spotted in the mistakes made during apprenticeship. It's the initiate's job to surpass such hurdles, to learn the lessons not only of magic but also of insight and self-reliance. A magician who can't or won't change the world — or change himself — is missing the most powerful magic of all. The initiate learns from each task, from each failure and from his very reaction to the revelations laid bare to his questing sight.

Initiates may not have the power to crack worlds, but in some ways, apprentices have something more valuable: They have *potential*. A Tradition mage knows what he can and can't do, has preconceived notions about enemies, allies and magic, and follows a rigid route to greater understanding. The initiate has none of these prejudices -- the entire world is unformed, and the initiate chooses how to see the magic about him. If the initiate avoids succumbing to insanity, lassitude, corruption or death, then his final destination is unknown and limitless. Without the basket of ready-made ideas and "truths" that other mages embrace, the initiate's destiny is wholly his own to make.

In Plain Text

As the apprentice's handbook, **Initiates of the Art** describes the life and tribulations of one newly Awakened to the power of a mage. An experienced mage takes much learning for granted, but there's more to magic than casting a few rotes and hanging out with a cabal. The processes of learning magic — the foundations that form a mage's Tradition, style, techniques and beliefs — are with the mage forever. It's during the apprenticeship that a mage explores the direction that her power will take and forms her opinions of other magical groups and practices. It's also during this time that mages form bonds with their companions and instructors who will guide, assist or combat them over their careers.

It's not enough just to sit at the Chantry and watch television. An apprentice has to live up to rigorous

standards. This book is all about surviving those trials — coming through the fire, hardened and forged into a keen, potent edge capable of slicing away the very threads of reality. Not everyone makes it. For those that survive and go on to master their Arts, the roots can always be traced to the beginning.

- **Chapter One: Awakening** describes the moment of awareness, the sudden illumination that strikes and turns an otherwise normal (or not-so-normal) person into a mage. What provokes an Awakening? How does the typical mage-to-be react to the sudden infusion of incredible knowledge, insane wisdom and reality-skewing power? The Avatar, once roused from slumber, gives a great shout and heaves off the bedclothes. Now it's time for the mage to face the cold, dark world.

- **Chapter Two: Finding Your Feet** is advice from various mages about diving into mage society. Once a mage Awakens, she inherits limitless potential. However, there's not always someone around to direct the mage to exploration of this newfound prowess. Finding a mentor, surviving initiation into a Tradition or Convention, or just going the Disparate road — each is a tough decision, and one that every initiate must deal with. Along with mage society and mentors, initiates have to deal with the sudden pull of the Avatar, leading them on inner quests and pulling them in startling directions. Every initiate learns to deal with that demon, or she is consumed by it.

- **Chapter Three: Life as an Apprentice** follows the day-to-day work of an initiate. Just because you've Awakened doesn't mean that your bills are suddenly paid, your roommates are less slovenly or your job is easy. Friends, family, enemies, other mages and the everyday crap that comes down on the Awakened all have a place in the apprentice's life. Without the raw power of an experienced mage, the apprentice has a careful balancing act ahead, trying to mix the perils of supernatural learning with the hazards of life.

- **Chapter Four: Resolution** explains where an apprentice goes once she's gotten past the initial shock. Not everyone survives to become a mage, and many don't even get past apprenticeship. Some just quit, ignoring their Avatars and trying to fit back into an ordinary life. Others are killed or driven insane. Nobody said that being a mage was going to be *easy!* If anything, magic makes life harder... but those that survive have a shot at the real power. How the apprentice passes through the first ordeals determines forever the path upon which her feet tread to Ascension.

- **Appendix: By the Numbers** covers game mechanics for apprentices: simple rotes and practice magic, minor Paradox manifestations and rules for creating apprentice-level characters (and, hopefully, moving them up into full mages).

It's a long, hard road. Good luck.



A°K

Chapter One: Awakening

From the notes of Sir Lawrence:

Every mage starts as a human. The human drives, motives and dreams all coalesce into the Awakening, the tugging of Avatar against human soul. The Awakening doesn't make the human go away, though. Too often,

magely mentors focus solely on the tricks and magic. A new apprentice doesn't have that luxury. He's still a human being, trying to cope with a suddenly wider, fascinating and dangerous world.

The Final Steps



Kyle looked down at the swirling waters of the river below him. Was it 200 feet? 250? He was never very good at judging distances, at least not by sight. Give him a mathematical equation, though, and he could give you a what-for of the universe. That was just how his mind worked. Real good on paper. Real bad in real life.

Which was a problem, really, because real life is what he had to deal with on a daily basis, and it really sucked. It wasn't the "Oh my life is so hard, oh the angst" type of suck either. It was the "If I go to school today Jake's going

to pull me aside at lunch and kick the ever living shit out of me" type of suck. Kyle could draw up any number of graphs and charts at a moment's notice, but he could not figure out the best hall to go down to avoid Jake and his gang offfriends.

Of course, if I'm dead, there's no more Jake to beat up on me. No more Carol to snub me. No more Dad to smack me. No more Mom to ignore me. No one will be better than me anymore. It'll all be over.

That thought occurred to him over and over. If he died, it would end. No more fear. No more pain. No more bullies. Just peace.

Kyle looked down into the swirling waters below.

Moving Towards the Path

How to describe an Awakening without mixing and mashing metaphors? Everyone Awakens differently. The Technocratic Union, if it had its way, would find a formula for Awakening, a certain road to enlightenment. Even the Traditions want to help people along with their paths and their trappings and their foci. The plain truth is that there is no one way to Awaken. It can happen to anyone, any time, and it is invariably unique to the individual.

A few points almost always seem to lead up to an Awakening, though. Some people experience a sedate, gradual Awakening, but that's rare. More often, the Awakening comes as a response to some soul-wrenching trauma or revelation. The confrontation of death, helplessness or utter despair—and, one hopes, to triumph over it—brings out the fighting elements of the soul, stirs the Avatar to wakefulness and *empowers* the mage-to-be.

A few mages are rumored to deliberately push people to the breaking point, in search of Awakenings. Such appalling traumatization is horrifying to most mages. After all, magic is the expression of self-will and determination; to corrupt that expression into a tortured parody is positively Nephantic.

In any case, most mages find their inner selves in the fire of trauma. Not surprisingly, the first burst of magic is an attempt to rectify this, to solve the problems or to get away. Everybody's heard about the famous Marauder who blasted himself straight into insanity after Awakening on the heels of a car collision and trying to bring his entire family back to life.

What's important is not so much the events of the Awakening, but the process leading up to it. A lot can be determined by a mage just by looking at the circumstances leading to his Awakening. For some, this is just a natural event, growing out of a monastic lifestyle or an idyllic childhood. A mage born in conflict has causes, though. Rarely does a mage find himself in the midst of flying debris without some cause. A mage in the midst of loss, battle or wistful regret generally has a reason for getting stuck there. The new mage might have a problem with backing down. He may not be assertive. Whatever

the case, it's likely that these personal difficulties led to the problems, which led to the Avatar stirring to address the issues, which then led to Awakening.

Examine an apprentice's motives, too. Is this a person who spent years in pursuit of dedicated goals, or one who flitted through life? Since anyone can wake up, there's no real definite categorization for mages. Make no mistake—as much as they hem and haw about it, most people walk into their own problems. People who confront their difficulties and overcome them seem to be more likely to become mages—probably because such assertive personalities take charge of their lives and direct them even before they ever realize magic.

Despite all of the apparent predilections to Awakening, there's no single formula for it. If someone had figured that out, the Ascension War would've ended a long time ago. It's like falling in love or dying: Nobody knows when it will happen, but when it does, it changes everything.

Signs and Portents

Okay, maybe it was a bit of a fib to imply that Awakenings all happen at random. There are a few things that almost always presage an Awakening, and knowing what to look for helps.

Most mages experience episodes of sporadic, though partial, insight as they approach Awakening. It's common to experience *deja vu*, to have uncanny premonitions or just a feeling that there's more out there. Dreams and hidden signs that become clear later are common, too, though few people admit to them before Awakening.

On the other hand, facility with magical phenomena isn't necessarily a component of Awakening. Some people seem to be able to do magic without Awakening at all. Others never evidence a single bit of weirdness until they open their inner eyes. Watch for *sudden* changes in behavior. Whenever the Avatar stirs, it influences the soul, just a little bit. When that happens, the person breaks out of his old mold, turning his little world on its head. People have changes of heart and personality all the time, but when someone starts moving in new and startling ways with frightening regularity, it may be a sign of things to come.

The Moment of Silence



"Now this looks familiar," a voice said behind him, startling him. Kyle clutched the railing as he turned his head around suddenly to see who had spoken.

She was a cute girl. He had to admit that. Well, "girl" was hardly the word. Woman was better. Dressed in hip-hugger jeans and a cropped T-shirt, with her long hair held back in a loose

ponytail and John Lennon's hanging on the tip of her nose, she looked like something left over from the '60s. But those eyes... they seemed to focus right past him.

How had she come up on him, and why didn't he hear?

"Now, what's so familiar..." She puzzled a moment, then her eyes lit up. "Well, duh! I did the same thing." She nodded. "Yep, I did, only," she pointed down the bridge, "I was hanging on right down there."

Kyle looked at her in puzzlement.

"What kind offreak are you?" he asked.

The woman smiled.

"I'm the Lee Ann kind offreak. " After a few moments she dropped the smile, becoming more serious. "You might want to come back up. It'll get cold soon."

Kyle stared a moment as she held out her hand. Finally, without much thought, he took it, grabbing her wrist and allowing her to help him back over the rail.

"Smart boy," she said. "You won't regret it. Not at all."

She started walking down the bridge, toward the mainland. Kyle just watched a moment before it occurred to him that he was supposed to follow. He did so, catching up to her and matching her pace. He was surprised that such a small woman could move so quickly, with so little effort.

"How did it feel?"

Kyle looked at Lee Ann, startled to hear her talk. He almost had to laugh at his amazement. Looking at her, he would think that chattering was her natural state. Of course, she had been quiet in the entire hour since they'd left the bridge. Had it been an hour? His watch confirmed. It had been an hour.

But she's so damn unsettling.

"What?" Kyle asked.

"When you woke up? How did it feel?"

Kyle shrugged. "Like it does any morning that I wake up. I'm groggy, then I pull myself out of bed --" He looked at Lee Ann, who shook her head. Not that he needed that signal. His answer felt wrong, even as he said it.

"I spoke to a Master once," she leaned closer to whisper, "I swore I'd never do it again." She stood back straight and continued. "He said that he knew he'd Awakened the day he saw magic for what it was, and that he could reach out and bend it to his will."

Kyle looked at her, eyes wide. He knew he should be disbelieving this, but something_____

"I looked at him and said, 'So, you didn't Awaken until you became a Disciple?'" she laughed. "Ryan was mortified. Hey, he opened himself to the insult. I don't typically like Hermes. Stuffed shirts if you ask me. Only one I ever met worth her mettle..."

Lee Ann trailed off.

Kyle shook his head. "Hermes? Disciple?"

Lee Ann smiled. "Don't worry your pretty head too much about those big words. All in good time. No, when I woke up, I saw the world for what it was. It was big, bad and ugly, and I was just an infinitesimal speck of dust in it. I never dreamed in a million years that I would be able to actually do anything about it. I was just amazed, once I got over the initial shock, that I could see it all."

Kyle stopped and looked at her. It took Lee Ann a moment to stop, and she turned and looked back at him.

"I realized that my parents were driven by things that went past even their lifetimes. My dad was a slave to patterns instilled in him by his father, and his father's father, and his father's

father's father. It was like looking at a tapestry. And my mother, hers was even worse. I could see how she wove herself into her world that she was engulfed by it, and if you even cut the tiniest string, she would bleed to death," Kyle said.

Lee Ann smiled and nodded.

"Most people don't see these things. We see things like this with clarity of vision that surpasses anything imaginable." She walked up to Kyle and took him by the shoulders. "Close your eyes."

"What?" he asked.

"Trust me. Close your eyes," she said. He did as she asked. "Focus on my words. Words have power. Imagine that your mind has a shape. An oval. Now, extend it out, out out, past your skull, past me, carry it around you, and extend farther, and farther."

Kyle did as she said, focusing on her words. He felt the strange sensation, not of leaving, but of opening. It was as if his mind was becoming filled with babble that he could not make out the words of.

"Pick a place, any place around you, and focus on that. Open your mind, all your senses, all your senses, completely to it. Tell me, Kyle, what do you see?"

Kyle continued, feeling, feeling, sensing, until he found it.

He jumped and his eyes flew open. His breathing was short.

Lee Ann looked at him with concern.

"What did you see?" she asked.

"Pain? Fear. Shame." He said, trying to calm himself.

"Where?" Lee Ann asked.

Kyle closed his eyes and thought a moment.

"5th Street Station," he said. He anticipated her next question. "Last night."

Lee Ann nodded. She closed her eyes, then opened them again a moment later. A chill ran down Kyle's spine as he realized that it took her more time to do... whatever she did, than he felt had passed. Something about the way she moved... like she was disjointed from the tick of the clock.

"There was a rape there," Lee Ann said. "Last night. A woman. I think we'll drop by the police station. I have a description for the police. I didn't do anything last night. I think I can step up as a witness."

Kyle looked at her in awe a moment.

Lee Ann shrugged. "It took me a while, but I learned that I can affect things. Sometimes, for the good."

Total Vision

To Awaken is to have a moment of clarity, a brief flash of insight and total vision. You can't push for it to happen, because until you've experienced it, you don't know what you're pushing for.

Really, it's pointless to try to put the Awakening down in words. If you've Awakened, you know it. If you haven't, you can't understand it. Even magic is insufficient to convey the experience, since each Awakening is deeply personal.



Look at the process of thinking for a moment. Normally, people process little bits of information, things that their senses or their memory convey, data collected from reading, life experience or conversation. Rarely does anyone ever have the whole picture, or the completed equation to a complete problem. People look at little bite-sized pieces of reality, since the small human mind just doesn't cope well with things like "infinity" and "eternity."

In a flash, all preconceptions are swept away, the depth of the soul is revealed and the multi-verse is briefly comprehensible. That's just a tiny, semi-rational part of Awakening. It doesn't stay — such insight must be nurtured into the mind, slowly added through experience and learning until it's second nature. However, it provides a moment where you can see the totality of what's possible, and how *you* can achieve it.

The Awakening comes on the heels of a Seeking of its own. Whether it's dealing with a traumatic event or just handling life as it comes, the mage draws out the attention of her Avatar, which suddenly rises up in a flash and, rejoining to the Quintessential Prime, provides a moment of insight into the workings of the cosmos. For some Avatars, this is easy; others take a bit of time to wake up. Either way, Awakening doesn't happen for no reason. It may not be apparent at first why someone woke up — if Dante really Awakened in the womb, his Avatar must have

had something really important to tell him — but the reason is always there, be it from personal action or from the accumulated wisdom of past lives.

You thought past lives weren't real? Ask your Avatar sometime. Look into your own consciousness and see the other souls that have shared your magic.

Often, when a mage first Awakens, he realizes his incredible potential. This is well and good, but untrained, that potential is hard to use. Some mages lash out instinctively with their talents, drawing on the former experience of their Avatars; such "wild talent" may well be more powerful than any magic that the mage will ever do again. Driven by extreme need and desire, a mage's Avatar sometimes pushes out incredible bursts of power, directed only by the new mage's panicked will. Naturally, this draws all sorts of attention and Paradox. No wonder that mentors try to make sure their charges Awaken in stress-free, controlled environments, where the apprentices aren't suddenly lashing out with sheets of fire and spirit-rending magic powered by the Avatar's sudden resurgence of universal energy!

Directing Awakenings is difficult at best, but it's ultimately why most mentors take on the mantle of instruction. Once a new mage Awakens, the incredible sensations fade quickly, but the off-kilter feeling of a wider world may linger for days, if it goes away at all. During this time, the mage is impressionable with new ideas and open to the ways of

magic. Grasping at the sudden insights of cosmology, the budding student can be quickly brought into the fold of a Tradition or Convention, so many established mages keep a watchful eye out for signs of sudden Awakening. A few enterprising magicians even keep a sensitive net out for the backlashes of Paradox and Resonance that often strike after a traumatic Awakening, jumping in to control the flying magic, help the student adjust, and recruit a new follower all at the same time.

Awakening in Fits and Starts

It sometimes happens that a mage evidences some limited forms of supernatural power, but without the true "cosmic consciousness" that seems to infect the real greats of Awakened society. These minor magicians and sorcerers can often accomplish great feats, yet they often lack the flexibility of a mage with a true Destiny and a fully Awakened Avatar.

Some esoteric scholars claim that these sorcerers are nothing more than "hedge wizards," capable of only limited magic. Others state that the minor magicians have fitful Avatars, halfway between sleeping and wakefulness. Some believe that sorcerers are throwbacks to older forms of structured magic, or even a different way of looking at magic entirely.

Me? I think that these sorcerers are every bit as important as any other mage. They didn't go through a normal Awakening, but if you can do magic, you're a mage. Some of them eventually Awaken and begin to see the real scope and breadth of what we fight for. Others stay helpful allies or mentors for a long time without delving into the real nuts and bolts of the cosmos, content to work on their "simpler" magical forms (as if there's anything simple about calling up storms, calling down love or casting out demons).

Now You're Fucked



"So, where are we going?" Kyle asked after long silence. They'd been walking around for quite sometime, seemingly without direction, though Kyle had an idea that Lee Ann knew where she was going. They'd been to the police station. He felt very uncomfortable there, but Lee Ann seemed to get along fine. Then again, he was beginning to suspect that Lee Ann could get along anywhere she went. She had a way of blending in. He'd almost lost her twice, and really wasn't sure how he'd done it, or how he'd spotted her again.

"Some people wake up differently," she had explained to him as they went to the police station. "For some, it is sudden and violent. They Awaken at the death of a loved one, or some equally tragic event. Some even Awaken with some of their potential power, for a short time. They are called wild talents by some and are very dangerous. Some Awaken after years of study. A few are practically born Awakened. That is to say, they never go to sleep. They are rare. I tell you this only so you understand that while we're all in the same boat, we didn't get there the same way."

"We're going to check email," Lee Ann now said. "I know a great little cybercafe on the other side of town."

Kyle sighed. He wondered if he should point out that they were just on the other side of town. Then again, it probably would not matter. He had an idea that Lee Ann followed something that he could not see and probably would never comprehend. At least he hoped he wouldn't. He had an idea that Lee Ann was not playing with all her memory chips, and he didn't want to end up the same way.

"So, what made me wake up?" Kyle asked. He decided to pick up where the silence left off.

Lee Ann shrugged. "I dunno, what caused you to wake up?"
Kyle looked at her a moment in shock. She simply smiled at him.

"A lot of things cause you to Awaken. Yours was pretty gradual, I would guess. So was mine. Not as gradual as, say, the occult student who studies for years and years, but not as sudden as being jolted Awake by violence. I've been watching you a while, I knew you would Awaken soon. There are signs, you know."

Kyle looked at her. "What sort?"

Lee Ann shrugged. "It depends. You can't really put it down in a formula. But even with people who Awaken suddenly, I've found by talking to them that there were little epiphanies beforehand. Dreams, wishes, desires, simply knowing that there is more. When I found you, I noticed you were going to Awaken soon because you did a lot of the things I did before I woke. You began questioning why your world had to be like it was. You were getting tired of the way things went. I was real impressed when you stood up to that boy."

Kyle rubbed his head absently. There was still a bump from when he got thrown into the lockers.

"It seemed futile, but you did it anyway. That happens a lot. Pieces start falling into place, and people wake up. Sometimes all the pieces fall in and you Awaken. Sometimes the pieces are still trying to fit when you are woken up. But either way, it usually happens like that."

"So why were you watching me?" Kyle asked.

"That's what I do. I watch for newly Awakened mages and find them teachers. I do the orientation stuff and let the bigwigs

take care of the rest. All in all, I've probably found homes for... well, lots of mages. "

"I have a home," Kyle said.

"You need a teacher. And you'll probably find that your home's a bit...problematic."

"Problematic?"

Lee Ann turned to walk into a doorway. "Later. We're here."

Moving Forward

Once you Awaken, there's nowhere to go but up. That's not to say that you immediately know how to fly, though.

The Awakening leaves a sort of imprint. Once the scales fall from your eyes, you can't help but see the world with a new awareness. Given that, it's impossible to run from Awakening, or to ignore it forever. Eventually, it forces you to move ahead. If your own gnawing realization that there's something more isn't enough, then your Avatar may push you along, through dreams, urges or even a sit-down talk.

If you're dumb, you wander around fucking up your life some more and telling all of your friends and co-workers about how wonking crazy you've become. You mess around with powers that you don't understand and you blow yourself to hell, if you don't get caught by the Technocracy or some other element of the supernatural community first.

If you're smart, you lie low and realize that either you're wonking crazy or you're experiencing something so different that everyone else like you hides it. Fortunately, there are some mages who have gotten quite good at spotting this little bit of difference.

Regardless of the path that a new mage charts, the Awakening colors it immensely. Look at your family and friends. Which one of them knows? Which of them would understand? That co-worker who was always a little bit strange — does he know what's going on? How about your significant other? Your adversaries and enemies? The random people on the street? That bag lady with the knowing look? Who knows what you've just discovered?

Given the strangeness that follows mages around, the neophyte must confront this problem sooner or later (probably sooner). Most newly Awakened are content to keep this bottled up, waiting for someone to show a sign or to make an approach. That's good. Spilling the beans to the wrong people can cause all sorts of problems, the least of which is the wrong sort of attention (cops, cranks and psychiatrists all being on that list). Usually, a few trusted confidantes, most likely from the family, wind up in on "the secret." This is difficult and dangerous, but necessary. Mages are people too, and they can't shut themselves off from human contact just because of the sudden realization of the magnitude of the cosmos. More than ever, the mage needs someone to talk to.

Eventually, the mage has to give, and that's where the long road is decided. If an established mage finds the novice in time, it's training in a Tradition, Convention or Disparate group. If the mage must experiment on his own, then there's a new Orphan on the block. These days, with the relative dearth of Masters hanging around the ol' planet, most neophytes have to settle for a bit of self-discovery, some limited Tradition training and maybe even a hodge-podge of development by several interested mages in a cabal, all lending a hand and a piece of wisdom.

The supernatural world doesn't let go once it has its hooks in. Those few who try to go back to their normal lives and ignore the call of magic find that the mundane world they once saw is gone. In every nook and cranny is possibility. The longer the mage tries to evade this responsibility, the more it cracks at the mind. Some mages theorize that the largest groups of Marauders are not those who "com-bust" upon Awakening, but rather those Quiet mages who try to keep it all in for too long. I don't know about that, but I do know that there are other things out there that take interest in mages. Avoid your Awakening for too long and they may decide to help you on the karmic wheel. And if you don't have a mentor or a friend when the vampires or werewolves, or whatever, show up at your door... well, it's not pretty.

Resolving the Push

Basically, things break down in one of a few ways: The neophyte cracks and becomes a Marauder; some stabilizing element — Traditionalist, Technocrat, Orphan or, heaven help us, Nephanderus — shows up; the mage works it out on his own; or, the fledgling bites it.

Once Awakened, the Avatar isn't content to sit around. It forces the mage to confront his own issues, and dodging magic isn't on the list of good deeds. Sometimes, the Avatar may arrange things without the mage even realizing it. Mages are surrounded by funny coincidences. If a Tradition mage just happens to show up in the same place as a confused newbie, then who's going to look askance at it?

If you've just gone through "the experience," then *get some help*. Learning to deal with magic on your own is extremely dangerous and usually not very fruitful. Even if you just wind up talking to some nutball on the subway who doesn't know the sky from his ass, you are at least not delving into Things That Man Was Not Meant To Know. Chances are, if you talk with enough wacky people, you'll find someone who can give you a bit of insight.

When all else fails, listen to the little voice in your head. Although Avatars seem to have their own agendas, they aren't likely to lead you totally astray (unless your Avatar is tainted, in which case, it's going to be a short ride anyhow). Insightful dreams, sudden hunches and a few lucky guesses can at least give you a direction to go.



A Helping Hand



:: So, what has she been telling you, kid? ::

Kyle looked down at his screen in surprise. He'd been simply browsing the Internet, not doing much, when the dialogue screen appeared. He wasn't really sure how it even popped up. He wasn't connected to any sort of chat program.

:: What? :: he typed in reply.

:: Lee Ann. What has she been telling you? :: came the response from the stranger.

Kyle just stared dumbly at the screen. He glanced over at Lee Ann, who was staring at her screen, oblivious to anything around her. He turned back to his own computer screen.

:: Who are you? :: he asked.

:: A friend. I know Lee Ann. I'm curious what she's telling you. I don't usually get to go along on her little newbie-expeditions. ::

Kyle frowned. :: Newbie? :: he asked.

:: Well, you did just wake up :: said the terminal. It wasn't a statement. :: She's probably been speaking over your head, if I know her. She tends to do that. Not her fault. Sometimes, I don't think she understands what she's saying. ::

:: -. She's been saying this and that. :: Kyle said.

:: Trusting soul you are. Good. You'll live a while. I don't trust people either. I trust Lee Ann, but that's really about it. Well, and other Adepts usually, but only for things I know I can trust them for. Lee Ann's one of the few people I trust with everything. ::

:: How sweet. :: Kyle remarked. :: I'm happy for you, really. ::

:: I sense sarcasm. That's fine. You'll figure out real quick though that trust is about to become a liability. You have family? Don't expect to be talking to your folks about this. ::

Kyle just blinked his eyes.

:: It's really hard for people to accept things like this. :: the stranger continued. :: you're completely different, and chances are, if you tell anyone about magic, they won't believe you. At least, not at first. ::

:: So then I'm on my own? :: Kyle asked.

:: Not completely. But you'll find real fast that there's a big difference between you and the rest of the world. They will sense it too. Some of them will look up to you for it. Some of them will instinctually be jealous, but most of them will simply distance themselves from you. ::

No different from how things are now, Kyle thought.



:: Then you're lucky.:: the stranger said. Kyle stared in disbelief. How did he... ? :: I was very close to my family before. After I woke, though, I found it very hard to relate to them. We grew apart and I've never really been able to bridge the gap, try as I might. These days I don't try at all.::

:: Why?:: Kyle asked.

:: Too dangerous. I have enemies that my family would not stand a chance against. Besides, my enemies could use them to get to me. When you're not around them, though, your enemies tend to forget that. Your family is in less danger. Not completely out of danger, but less. Pseudonyms are a good thing to have.::

Kyle nodded.

:: It's sad, yes. Friendships are the same way. Of course, I have a hard time making friends because I like being around people. I can relate too. Non-mages, they don't understand, can't understand usually, and it's really hard to talk about things I'm going through with them. I'm sure there are a few rare cases, but....::

:: I've never been able to relate to people.:: Kyle typed.

:: Ah, class geek?:: the stranger asked.:: That's not uncommon. I was actually rather popular when I was in school. Lots of friends, all the good stuff. It all changed after I Awakened. Not that I regret it, though. My life's also fuller now than it has ever been. Despite the pitfalls, I like where I am.::

:: That's good.:: Kyle responded.

:: Yes, it is. But there are a lot of pitfalls, believe me. You think it's bad for you now, getting picked on? Well, the bullies only get stronger. Even other mages will probably ridicule you at some point. And you will always have enemies. Trust me on that one. Mages are magnets for trouble, and you just joined the club. They'll probably want to use you and abuse you, and some will try to kill you. It's a rough world. You have to stay on your toes, kid.::

Kyle shook his head.

:: You better get. Lee Ann's ready to go.:: the stranger wrote.

Kyle logged off and turned to look at Lee Ann.

"Have fun?" she asked.

"Oh, loads," Kyle replied. Lee Ann frowned. She could tell he wasn't exactly happy at the moment.

"I was just chatting with Ryan. I think I know where I'm going to take you," she said. "It's only a short walk and will give us a little more time to talk."

Kyle looked at her and smiled.

"I think I was talking to him, too," he said.

"Not surprising. E-mail chat is like that. Of course, you'll find that when you get a handle on things, that you can handle multiple things at the same time. It's a nice trick and really useful."

Lee Ann stood up, waiting for Kyle to join her. They paid for their computer time and left, wandering the streets again.

"So, is there anything good about any of this?" Kyle asked.

Lee Ann nodded.

"There are lots of good things. There's a high price to pay, but it's worth it. Think of the rapist that the police will probably

The Inevitable Crossover

"Well, my initiate is kinain to changelings, and he knows this werewolf..."

We've heard it, we've been there, we've seen it done. On the other hand, a little spice makes everything tastier.

As long as occult connections don't get out of hand, they can add quite a bit of depth to a chronicle. If just one member of an apprentice group knows a particular supernatural creature, has a specific ally or relation to a paranormal entity, then you can play with that connection for the whole group. Vampires, werewolves and changelings all have very odd misconceptions about mages. If a neophyte mage winds up taking his cues from a companion of another group, some interesting complications can arise. Vampires tend to see mages in terms of the Tremere, and they are generally oblivious to the full potential of willworking — and also quick to Blood Bond any mage foolish enough to fall under their sway, elaborating on the benefits of ghoulings while evading the subject of thralldom. Werewolves have antagonistic relations with most mages, but a kinfolk can get away with a little, just so long as he doesn't show up on the caern (since all mages raid caerns for their magical energy, of course). Changelings are perhaps the most congenial to wizards, though they are often terrified of the raw power and potential that a magician wields. Furthermore, the fae see magic in terms of dream-arts, and so they can offer creativity or faerie glamours to a magician, but little in the way of a metaphysical system.

A novice magician can become embroiled in all manner of plots when involved with members of other arcane societies. This is a quick and easy way for the Storyteller to make some hooks, and it's a good way to expose the novice cabal to some different ways of thinking. If the Ascension War was just about mages, after all, then the other supernatural creatures obviously wouldn't have any impact on humanity... but they do. Finding the roles for the pieces that don't fit, the pieces that even other mages don't study, can be an intriguing challenge — and one that initiates can do with their wits alone.

different things, when they're not in space or the spirit worlds or doing fruity stuff like that. (It grows on you. Trust me.) Look for mages in counterculture and alternative spots. Nightclubs, bookstores, funky occult shops and hiking trails are good spots. So are temples and churches. If you're really feeling spooky, you can even give a graveyard a shot, though that tends to attract the wrong sort of intervention.

On the flip side, if you're not comfortable with these sorts of things... get used to it. Clinging to old ways of life and old habits doesn't move you up the chain. Spending your time in universities and the workplace is a good way to get nabbed and processed by the Technocracy. That may be a form of advancement, but it's rarely pleasant and puts you on the list of "bad guys."

find now. He won't be hurting anymore women once they catch him. It's little things like that that make being a mage worth it."

"But there's no one to talk to about it. No one to turn to," Kyle said.

"Sure there is. Okay, the rest of the world is pretty hard to relate to, I'll give you that. But it's the rare bird that has no one. I've seen a few mages completely untutored or even self-taught. Those are rare. The untutored, they usually die or go crazy. Those who manage to teach themselves, I'm real nice to because I don't want to know how they managed to survive. But they have unbelievable potential.

"You'll get a mentor though, and he'll teach you what you need to know. I'm taking you to a hacker's club where many of the hackers happen to be mages. Ryan thinks you'll get along fine with them. They'll continue where I've left off. You'll probably make friends with a few of them. They're all nice enough, but a little weird for me."

Kyle had to smile at that.

"You're lucky. I don't find everyone who Awakens. Finding help, though, is simply a matter of knowing where to look. From now on, you can start with your mentor, or me, when you need help. If we can't help you, or don't want to for whatever reason, then we can point you on where to find help. Old-fashioned investigation is good. Sometimes you'll have to take a chance on trusting strangers. Just keep your wits about you, and learn what you can. Remember that for every friend, there are three enemies. Also remember that when you manage to find that friend, you've found something worth more than gold."

Lee Ann stopped walking and smiled.

"You'll do good."

She pointed up to a second floor window in the building next to them.

"That's where you want to be. Just tell them you know me. They'll do the rest."

Kyle nodded.

"Thanks," he said. "You're not coming in?"

Lee Ann shook her head. "No, I have to be off. Besides, I make some of them nervous. You'll do good, though. I think you'll relate well."

"Um, will I see you again?" Kyle asked.

Lee Ann smiled.

"You will, if you need to. Now get on up there," Lee Ann said as she turned him toward the door. She gave him a small shove and waved as he went in. Kyle turned to watch her spin and continue aimlessly down the street.

Getting a Hand(out)

You know enough to get help. You know that there are other mages out there, if you're reading this. You may not have a friendly Disciple like Lee Ann to lead you around and show you the ropes. What do you look for?

Mages are dynamic people by nature. They tend to hang out in places where they can see and do weird and



If You Already Know All This

A rare and lucky few of you folks have some experience with the occult already. Congratulations! You're more likely to get snapped up into some supernatural conspiracy, or to blow your own head off while trying something beyond your capabilities.

Some mages start with structured magics, working their way up until the moment of Awakening. If you're one of them, then you've just learned the best trick of all: You get to throw away everything you knew and rebuild your magic from the ground up. Fortunately, you already know about dedication, study and hard work. Chances are, you know a couple of other mages, too.

If you're some other kind of weirdo, then you are already into the occult conspiracy angle. Vampires, werewolves, faeries — whatever your particular bent, you can bet that you will be first against the wall when they find out about your sudden revelation. Face it, every group out

there has power struggles, and having a power that nobody else has — that is, you — is a major bonus. Most likely, you'll be pulled around in different directions as you try to balance your newfound talents with the demands of your compatriots. Word of advice: Your magic comes first. All the work that you do to help your werewolf friends isn't going to do one bit of good when you suddenly explode in a storm of Paradox because you haven't been studying what you can and can't get away with.

Your best bet in such a situation is usually to get out. You may have friends and relatives among the occult community, but all mages have friends and relatives who must be left behind. Your new awareness makes you a commodity. You have a responsibility to yourself and to all mages to make the most of your talents, not to get sucked into some little war for personal reasons. Vampires have been running around for centuries and can get along without you. You, on the other hand, have only one life to live.

Storyteller's Circle



So, you're Storytelling an Awakening. Whether it is for a prelude, or as an active part of the game, it is very important to understand the nature of Awakenings, and to be able to communicate it to players. There are four basics to keep in mind when dealing with Awakenings:

There are no Systems. There are no "This happens, then this, then this." There are all sorts of Awakenings, and how, cause and type can vary from case to case. That isn't to say that there are not ways of approaching it, there just aren't dice or a lot of rules.

Remember, an Awakening has a catalyst — something that sparks it, a form and effect on the mage. From there you can have fun. The Awakening can be as simple as the character discovering an answer to a complex problem, to being as involved as a vision quest into the mind. The how is the easiest; it happens. The rest depends heavily on the character, and what you and the player want for the character.

Wild Awakenings work a little differently. A Wild Awakening is when the character Awakens with the very temporary ability to access full potential as a mage. Such Awakenings are rare and very dangerous. In mechanical terms, they should happen only with a mage who has at the very least three dots in the Avatar rating, and the level of Spheres and Arete accessed should not exceed the rating. Remember, a Wild Awakening happens when the Avatar for a brief time "takes over." While this is only a suggestion, it gives the Storyteller a guideline. In a Wild Awakening, the mage throws about magic through instinct, far beyond

his normal untrained capabilities. Such capacities are the purview of the Storyteller, of course, so a player cannot expect or immediately jump into a Wild Awakening — a powerful Avatar doesn't guarantee the matter.

Players who want to bring in a mage who is just Awakening need to be aware of what this means. They begin with a significantly weaker mage, and are often targets for the characters' enemies. As a Storyteller, you need to be at least somewhat aware that this can change the pace and sometimes focus of your chronicle. If you're wanting the characters to seek out a lost Oracle, this isn't likely to happen if one of them has just Awakened and is only beginning to understand magic.

Now you can start the story here, allowing players to begin play with characters who Awaken as part of the game. In a lot of cases, this requires a lot of one-on-one roleplay with you and single players. It is also a very demanding kind of chronicle, for players and Storytellers, as you have to build what is usually part of a character's background. The Appendix has rules for building mages to Awaken, or newly Awakened mages.

Awakenings have great plot possibilities. How would the characters react to finding a Wild mage? Can they find a trustworthy mentor for the child with the keen insight? How do they keep a newly Awakened mage out of the clutches of his Nephantic girlfriend? There are hundreds of possibilities for plots, subplots and interesting twists when you consider what it's like to Become.



Chapter Two: Finding Your Feet



Nita drove a '67 Mustang that we called Shenehneh. As in "dat's Shenehneh — she know what up!" She'd lean out the window and yell at people passing by, "Hey! I'll fuck you for your car!" She respected men who wouldn't sleep with her.

She played guitar, too. Sometimes we'd go to her house and sit in her basement, with her playing her acoustic and me making up goofy blues lyrics. The house wasn't old, and it was in the really expensive area of town, but it always felt like a trailer to me. Maybe it was Nita's mother, who wore faded pink stretch-pants, or the fact that all the carpet was dark brown, the drapes were never open and there were newspapers and junk mail scattered around everywhere. Whatever, though — it just felt like a white trash place and I was always a little uncomfortable there.

But Nita was my friend, and she was exciting to hang around with. And things just happened when I was around her. Not that she really made any of it happen, but... these sorts of things only happened when I was with her.

The first thing was little. We were driving to Blockbuster in her dad's huge truck — it was one of the many times when Shenehneh wasn't running—and some friend of hers was sitting in back while I sat shotgun. We made the unprotected left that would take us into the parking lot, just as we were about clear, though, something slammed into the rear quarterpanel of the truck.

I guess the guy in the little gray Rabbit thought we had cut the turn too close or something, because as soon as we pulled out of the roadway, he ran out of his car and started yelling—some crap about him not being able to stop and what did we think we were doing, and we better know a good lawyer because he felt whiplash coming on. I was too surprised to do much, but Nita pushed her brown plastic glasses up on her nose, straightened her Wranglers and kicked open her door.

"Me? What the hell were you thinking? You had 15 seconds to even look at us, and you didn't slow down! We had a green light!"

Not the world's most powerful speech.

It must have worked, though, because the sight of a lanky, freckled 16-year-old girl in Wranglers, Converse hightops, a black t-shirt and nerdy glasses shut the guy up completely. He couldn't do anything but sputter. When the police arrived, he suddenly found his voice — and his arsenal of curse words. It could have been the fact that he was being arrested for DUI and for a couple of warrants the cops already had out on him, but I guess he thought it would be really studly to flail around in the handcuffs and scream "bitch" as he was being stuffed into the cop car. It ended up that he got an extra harassment charge for it.

See? A little thing. Some yutz getting more than he bargained for when he nailed us with his car. But it was pretty typical. Nothing ever stayed simple around Nita, not even when we were in my neighborhood. I lived in the east end of town, where all the new transplants from other states — and all their

money — were moving in. It seemed boring and sterile and safe until Nita and I decided to go out for ice cream.

The Blue Coyote Cafe was the last thing in a strip mall that marked the end of the yuppie subdivision territory. Over the chainlink fence that bordered the parking area was a vacant lot littered with beer bottles, broken two-by-fours and dirty slush. A few filthy rags had slunk over to the bottom of the fence and piled soggily against the twisted wire. All the other businesses had closed for the evening, with the mall and its covered sidewalk dark, and my mom's Jeep was the only car in the lot.

There were some people hanging around, though, in the shadows beyond the violet neon light thrown out of the cafe windows. I tried to ignore them, tried to be cool, but one of them stepped out as I hurried to keep up with Nita's long strides. The kid wore a black leather jacket and had sunken, cruel eyes in a pale face — I guess I would call him a goth now, but I didn't know what goth was then, and now I'd think that would be terribly unfair to goths. He reached out and snagged my coat with his hand.

"Hey, look at this." He waved toward a pillar where a scraggly girl and a spiky-haired, sour-smelling guy shifted ghoul-

ishly in the dark. The girl gestured with the end of her nose at the ceiling. "Look what we caught." I looked up.

They had caught a squirrel. It swayed very slowly in midair, suspended by an intricate web of twine that held its paws outstretched and kept it in a twisted sort of crucifixion. Its head flopped back, and its tiny jaw gaped open to show its sharp lower teeth. At first I thought it was bleeding from its ears, but I realized that the streaks of viscous liquid fouling its cheeks were the remnants of its eyes. The sockets were dark; the beady blackness had been gouged out and popped like rotten blueberries.

I stood hypnotized, unable to look away from the macabre little thing. Its tail was so perfect and fuzzy — The kid still had hold of my arm, and he leaned close. "Look... you see it?"

Nita broke the obscene spell by yanking my arm free and dragging me into the Blue Coyote. She sat me down, then marched out the door again. When we left, the kids and their squirrel were gone. The strip mall was back to normal, but I had been changed. Nita didn't say much on the way home, and I haven't seen her since.

Things still happen to me, though.

Finding and Keeping a Mentor



Always two there are, a master and an apprentice.

— Yoda, Star Wars: *The Phantom Menace*

Beginning the Search

Mastery and Teaching by Chas. A. Marketwell, Adeptus Major, Magister Alumnae.

First known appearance 1935.

Transcription, 1999, by M. Rachel Richards, Zelator.

Section V.III.i

As demonstrated in the previous section, it is easy for a seasoned Adept to survey a group of young men and quickly pick out the ones with some amount of aptitude for arcane study. There are certain characteristics common to almost all potential Order mages — it could be ventured that there are certain traits possessed by all mages of every tradition, but that is a topic for another treatise entirely — and one who would become a teacher must recognize the things that identify his students.

This does nothing for the young man who realizes his interest before he is approached by a teacher. How is this student to find himself a tutor? He is inexperienced in the ways of arcane society, and he certainly hasn't the perceptiveness necessary to pick out a willworker knowledgeable and experienced enough to instruct him. So what is a hopeful to do?

Perhaps the best way to find a teacher when one is new to things arcane is to make contacts among one's peers. Though people with the gift for true understanding of the Tapestry and its workings are rare, they are not so uncommon that they cannot be found, given the proper amount of determination on the part of the seeker. Engage fellow students or friends in discussions that involve the occult or some esoteric pursuit and gauge their reactions. If one seems more knowledgeable or interested than the rest, then delve further. It is not unlikely that, with enough casting of this net, the would-be neophyte will catch himself a pater.

Libraries are also good beginning places for the search. If the library has a reasonable selection of esoterica, the list of names written on the slip of paper attached to the inside cover of the books can direct the student to others who share his interest. At best, one name will be immediately apparent, and the student has only to track the man down. At worst, the student will become familiar with the more common elements of a mage's library.

The logical extension of the library search is the institute of higher learning. Universities often hold eccentric professors, and even the teachers of more common subjects, such as chemistry, may have insight into the occult. If no such professors exist at the local school, however, there may still be something of interest in the museum or the history department.

Fraternal orders might provide some entry into even more obscure groups. Some members of our own Order cultivate relationships with Freemasons, and it is not unheard of for a man to be a member of both societies. Again, at worst the student gains a passing knowledge of the working of a group of people intent upon achieving obscure goals and forming private societies.

Finally, the aptitude for willworking has been known to be handed down generation to generation; perhaps the student would do well to make subtle inquiries of his parents, uncles and cousins. It is well documented that, in some traditions, the strongest groups are familial in nature. As mentioned, accomplished mages do not often proclaim their presence to the general public, so the young man thinking that his parents could never have such knowledge might find himself surprised.

In any case, the search for a master is often instinctive in many newly Awakened novitiates; feelings of alienation and differences in insight naturally lead to the search for a common peer group. As the prospective magus delves into research, the experience of seeking metaphysical knowledge — looking for a proper mentor or a record that he is not unique in this sudden revelatory change — provides valuable experience for later works. The search for magic is, after all, a quest for knowledge, and the student who finds a mentor after a rigorous search through libraries, museums and secret societies is much better prepared to continue that quest with later competence.

Finding Teachers Today

Addenda to Marketwell

Marketwell obviously skips a few methods of searching out mentors that are common in the modern day. The Internet is the first that comes to mind: e-mail, newsgroups and chat-type programs like IRC and ICQ can bring students into contact with knowledgeable people of all traditions, from all over the world. The question of the master's having hidden himself; Marketwell is consistently and characteristically sexist in his language — is still valid, though. Lurkers are hard enough to draw out when they're mundane. Drawing a reticent Hermetic into a discussion is exponentially more difficult.

Libraries also have a somewhat different character now than Marketwell has described. The days of index cards and rubber-stamp due dates in the back of library books are gone, and check-out records are not easy to access unless one works for the library. On the other hand, libraries tend to have many more books on the occult and metaphysics than they had in 1935. The increased availability of information makes up, in part, for the lack of easily accessed lists of interested people.

Also, the increase in public interest in esoteric matters makes it much easier for someone hoping to become an apprentice to both express his interest openly and to find

groups of like-minded people. There are spiritual groups, covens, cabals and simple reading groups advertised on the bulletin boards of bookstores and coffee houses everywhere. Newspapers run classified ads for Thelemic studies. Starhawk is almost a household name. All of these things give today's apprentice a considerable advantage over the apprentices of Marketwell's time — it's much more acceptable to be interested in the occult and to discuss occult matters now than it was then. Just talking to people, then, may be the student's best chance to find himself a mentor before the mentor finds him.

-MRR

Consideration and Choice

Section V.III.iii

The selection of an apprentice by a master is a long process, characterized primarily by the careful examination of the potential student's study habits, aptitude for the arcane arts, willingness to accept instruction, personal habits, temperament and a variety of other factors that might seem incidental or trivial upon first review. However, the pair must be perfectly suited in order to foster a successful educational environment. A master cannot instruct a student who, for example, is incapable of sitting quietly for even an hour, much less 15; neither can he teach a hopeful who is more interested in pursuing young ladies than cultivating strength of will.

The pater's role in the pairing is the most often recognized and addressed in texts much like this one, with suggestions, guidelines and sometimes even rules laid out left and right for the magus' apprentice-seeking efforts. This is all well and good, but there must be some attention paid to the role of the student. Unconventional as the thought may be within some circles, the apprentice's comfort and satisfaction contribute as much, if not more, to the training of a new mage as do the teacher's.

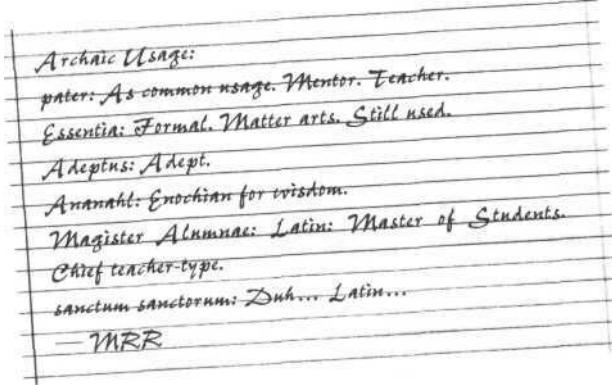
Should a student not be comfortable with his master, she will chafe at his lessons, finding them restrictive and oppressive. She may become lazy or rebellious, deliberately sabotaging her own education out of a simple desire to eject herself from the situation. Either way, the Order has lost a mage — perhaps two — and the *Ananahl*, the wisdom of the Order, has dimmed. For the good of both then, and for the good of the Order itself, the student must be given some voice in her training, and I offer this section as a guide for the student.

First, the student must consider whether the master's approach to the arts is compatible with his own. An Adeptus of Essentia may not be the proper tutor for the student interested in the workings of animals' insides; the Magister Scholae cloistered in his tower would almost certainly discourage the more dynamic initiate whose primary goal is to channel the raw elements of nature.

Second, the novice should evaluate his potential teacher's temperament, just as the master has evaluated his. In many cases, the master and the student must share living quarters, sometimes between the two of them only, sometimes with a much larger group of apprentices and masters together. In the second case, little can be done to keep each content with the others, but in the first, much can and must be done to keep the household free of ill will. The primary step in keeping problems from occurring is to steer clear of the things that cause problems in the first place. This may seem overly simple, but the soundest principles in physics and the Arts are always simple. If the student is physically intolerant of tobacco smoke, for example, he must avoid taking apprenticeship with a master who cannot live without his pipe.

The corollary to this piece of advice, though, is that sometimes part of a student's education is tolerance, patience and forbearance. Ability to concentrate despite distractions is vital to a mage's success, and it is part of the pater's duty to his apprentice to teach this concentration through praxis in the most literal of senses. The balance between irreconcilable differences in temperament and simple annoyance is delicate. The neophyte should be absolutely certain that he has taken the correct measure of his own character and of his preferences. Though it is not impossible to find a new pater (see Section V.III.iv), it is unpleasant at best. In addition, it is surely folly for a student to refuse an otherwise ideal master on the grounds of one tiny flaw or habit — perfection is not the province of the neophyte.

Thirdly, the student should assess the teacher's material ability to instruct. Does the mage have a library? A *sanctum sanctorum*? Time to devote? This is rarely a concern among those Adepts and Magistri of the Order, but those students seeking to join other groups ought to weigh this question carefully. The volume of knowledge that a student must absorb in order to complete even the most basic of arcane studies is staggering; he does himself a disservice by taking apprenticeship with a magus of inferior capabilities. (This is not to imply that the instructor himself is inferior. As discussed in other treatises, it is not every mage, or even every Order mage, who can escape the mundanity of life and its responsibilities entirely.)



On the subject of life's mundanity, the novice must consider his base human needs. Will he be sheltered during his apprenticeship? If he has others for whom he must provide, how will his dependents' needs be met? Must he earn a wage to pay room and board, or is the tutor prepared to shoulder the burden of all aspects of the student's existence? Though fasting is an accepted form of preparation for Workings among some magi, it should not be a constant state of being. If the student is to provide entirely for himself, as is common with some Eastern sects, the training takes on an entirely new timbre — the task of living each day must be incorporated into the course of arcane instruction.

Finally, there is the question of other students. Some neophytes are only distracted by their peers in lessons; others are spurred to excel through competition and rivalry. A potential apprentice should be extensively familiar with a study environment, and he should know before accepting a position whether he is of the former or latter type. Obviously then, the student who works best unaccompanied by other apprentices should avoid becoming the ward of a pater with a brace of pupils. The student who is encouraged by the presence of others should -- again obviously—avoid solitary towers occupied only by himself, his master and several thousand dusty tomes.

As a last word upon this particular subject, I remind the student that he is just that — a student. He does not yet know all that is involved in the education and training of a magus, and to assume that he always knows better than older, more seasoned mages is to invite disaster. These guidelines are simply suggestions. If a student's superiors all agree that he must take apprenticeship under a particular master, despite the student's dislike of the individual, it is nigh imperative that he do so. I advocate the most comfortable pairings possible between master and apprentice. I do not advocate wanton disrespect of one's elders and flagrant self-absorption on the students' part.

Master-Student Relationships and Conflicts

Addenda to Marketwell

Once again, Marketwell's particularly dry and uninspiring, but he hits most of the important points. A student isn't going to learn much from a teacher with whom she can't get along. Some mentors just don't have the aptitude to take on students at all, despite their desires. There's more to training than just latching on to the first mage that you meet.

When "picking out" a mentor, remember: *There will be some things you don't like*. Given the difficulty of finding a truly talented mage to teach the mysteries, you may have to take what you can get. Some parts of apprenticeship are always annoying, difficult or even painful, and the student



who tries to get out of that is not simply looking for a better teacher but is rather looking for an easy way out. The trick is to find someone whose foibles you can live with.

As an apprentice, you have to expect that there will be episodes of conflict. The very process of learning magic requires inquiry, and those questions and explorations will inevitably lead to clashes of opinion. You have to play a careful dance: On the one hand, annoying your master too much will get you thrown out on your ear, perhaps even Branded. On the other hand, you can't grow and develop as a mage until you start blazing your own trail. The mentor is just a guiding hand, while you have to provide the motive force.

Above all, know *when to cool off*. Arguing with your mentor is okay. It's even expected. Back off, let it sit, and come back to work on the problem another day. Hasty judgments will just hurt later. Give yourself enough time to absorb what you've learned. Some masters teach by contra-

diction or just by giving you vexing puzzles to figure out. The more you let yourself think about something, the more solutions you can come up with, and the more likely you are to figure out when things have really gotten bad enough to bail out. Your mentor knows more than you do, and probably has a good handle on how to guide your lessons, but that doesn't mean that the master is always right. Figure out your comfort level and let your master know up front what you'll deal with, what you won't do and how far you'll go. (Be prepared to break that, too, since most masters will push you to break into new ground.) If you can't learn anything else — either because you've learned all of your teacher's tricks, or because some fundamental disagreement prevents you from working together anymore — get out so that you can both move on.

— MRR

Initiation

Young Mages: A Survey, essay by Travis McNair.
Excerpted from Part Three.

Most organized Traditions have some sort of initiation, whether it's a five-hour naming ritual or getting rip-roaring drunk with the other initiates and mentors. Here we present an example of the more formal initiations. This pamphlet

comes from a Chorister in Akron, Ohio, named Ramona Brightman. She saved it from the last initiation she attended in the Akron house of worship and song, and she sends it along with her blessing and the hope that it will help young initiates overcome the fear of their imminent passage into acolytehood.

Spotting Your Apprentice

Great, so you know what to look for in a teacher. How does a prospective teacher spot an apprentice? If the Traditions knew, they'd have a much better handle on the Ascension War.

It's impossible to tell if a given individual will ever Awaken. Even divinatory Time magic only paints possible futures, and potential mages often have cloudier futures than others. Worse still, a mage could block himself from Time scrying, so that his past self is clearly marked as a future mage — but who wants to risk training an apprentice who goes on to blot out his presence from timesight? Who knows how he could turn out?

It's not too hard to find someone after the Awakening, of course. A little Prime sense can note the Quintessence stored in a latent mage's Avatar and pattern (assuming that the student has an Avatar rating). Some Entropy magic can tell when the "coincidences" around the new mage are actually reality bending. And, of course, Spirit magic can tell when the Avatar moves within (or without) the apprentice.

Mages have found that the most reliable way to get a potential apprentice, aside from wandering around looking for the newly Awakened, is to train a group of acolytes, preferably ones with powerful Destinies. A mage with strong connections to Entropy can feel the pull of reality as it bends around a powerful Destiny, pulling a person into a specific place. Although some otherwise normal people carry a potent Destiny, those with a strong thread often have some tie to the supernatural — potential to Awaken, perhaps, or a link to some other element of the paranormal. Of course, the individual's Destiny could always lead down the dark path... but that's a risk that every teacher must take.

Smooth Transitions

You may be sitting right now, this paper clutched in your hand, sweating as you try to remember all the right responses to the questions the Exarchs will ask you, remember all the right places to murmur "Praise" and "Let us glorify the One." You might be clutching your hands to your chest, quivering with the sheer exhilaration of this all. Either way, take a minute to read this. Breathe deeply, and remember that you're here because you are Chosen. You'll be fine!

What's Going to Happen?

Initiation is not as scary as it might seem. It's not as earthshaking as it might seem, either. What you, your mentor and anyone else participating are here to do is present you to the group and to the One formally. It's a rite of passage — a social ceremony that marks someone's transition between one stage of life and another. In your case, the rite of passage is celebrating your

transition from being "just a regular person" into being a member of the Faithful.

Your mentor — your Praecept — will have shown you the basic things that will go on today, so we'll just hit some practical highlights first, then move on to some more spiritual matters.

Before the Rite

Be sure that you've showered, used the restroom and done everything you might need to do before you stand outside the Catechumen's Door. If you need to take any medications, be sure you give them enough time to work before the ceremony. Be sure your robes are comfortable, too.

Don't worry about reviewing your catechism once you've gotten into your robes. Praecepts make sure their apprentices know every word, every response — getting stressed out now isn't going to make things easier.

Only check to see that you have all your ritual things -- hymnbook, silk cord, sand, candle -- once. You might want to do this check right as you're getting ready to leave the acolyte's room for the initiation. That way, you know you have everything as you leave, and there's no checking, double-checking, triple-checking, or putting things down "just for a second" and leaving them behind. Getting too stressed out over your items, just like the catechism, isn't going to make things easier.

During the Rite

Once again, relax. Don't get worked up about when the next pause is going to come up and you're going to be required to say something. It'll just happen. The masters have done this before, and they'll let you know when you need to do something.

However, don't get too lazy and let your thoughts wander. You don't need to be stressed, but you do need to pay attention. Generally, though, this isn't a problem; most apprentices are excited and hang on every word that's chanted, sung or spoken.

You may be surprised or awed at the appearance of the Exarchs and of your own mentor during the ceremony. They'll be in their full regalia as Singers, and many of them take on impressive attitudes when they're in the house of worship, giving glory to the One.

It's also possible that you'll surprise yourself. A handful of initiates have begun to glow during the rite, and a few sang in tones they never knew they had before. Don't worry - whether you do or don't, it's your strength in the Power showing itself at your presentation, nothing more. And you'll get more used to it as you participate in more and more formal events.

After the Rite

Once you're done, you're officially a member of the Congregation. Celebration is most definitely called for, but not until you've finished everything up. While you're in the sanctum, you should stay in your ritual behavior and keep it going until you've left the Exarchs' presence, gone out the door, and gotten back into the acolytes' room. Even then, wait a few minutes. Wait until you've gotten your robes off and slipped into a more everyday frame of mind - and out the front door — to scream, sing, dance or whatever else. But once you're out, go for it.

After the celebration, you may want to spend a few extra minutes in contemplation or praise, whichever you prefer, before you go to bed. You've been through an important stage

of your training and begun a new phase of life, so it might not hurt to think about it once you're away from the pressure of the situation itself. What did it mean to you while you were going through the initiation? What does it mean to you now that it's done? And what do you see in the experience for your life as a Chorister?

That's what it's all about, really — your life as a Chorister. The initiation is just the beginning (just a hello and a handshake in the face of a lifelong relationship).

What If?

Initiates are always asking about the what ifs. Here are some of the common questions and some answers.

What if I forget the words I'm supposed to say?

If you forget, look to your mentor. She's there to help you; all the Singers are. She might prompt you, or she might remind you some other way. Don't worry too much if you do forget some words — it happens and none of the masters are going to be angry.

What if I have to sneeze, visit the restroom, or fetch something I forgot?

If you have to sneeze, try to think of something else. If that doesn't work, well then sneeze.

Unfortunately, leaving the ritual room once the rite has started isn't an option. This is a difficult situation, but you should be able to focus your attention on the rite itself and distract yourself. The meditation exercises your mentor assigns you have purposes beyond learning to simply meditate — learning to shut out mundane thoughts is one of those purposes.

What if I trip/burp/pass gas/do something else embarrassing during the rite?

Don't worry about it. Keep your cool, and keep your focus. No one really gets upset about such small things, and chances are that if you don't call attention to it, no one will notice anyway.

What if I change my mind?

Ideally, you've done your soul-searching before you ever get near the acolytes' room and the ritual robes. If that doesn't hold true, you're left with the sort of question that no pamphlet could ever address. If you find yourself questioning your decision, you may want to call in your Praecept; beyond that, your Avatar and your own mind must guide you.

Good luck, and go in harmony.

Less Structured Initiations

Of course, not all apprentices are part of such traditional, procedure-oriented groups. Many, if not most, get inducted into their specific societies while they aren't looking. Like growing up, it happens without anyone really noticing until it's almost done.

Some apprentices to the Verbena don't realize that they've been initiated into a Tradition at all until they attend their first gathering. The individual mentor simply guides the student's thinking, asking probing, leading questions and allowing the student to follow a certain path, though sometimes a vague one, to full apprenticeship.

Members of the Cult of Ecstasy routinely let their initiates find their own way to the group's mentality. Of course, drugs, alcohol, music and sensualism are generally involved, so the Ecstatics might be guiding the apprentices more than they let on.

Among the Sons of Ether, initiation seems to correspond to an acolyte's first creation or invention. Sometimes

Lies and Propaganda

The "propaganda" slanderously presented here regarding our glorious Union fails to address Empowerment in even a cursory fashion. Naturally, the Technocratic Union cannot use hypnosis, torture, coercion and trickery to gather new Enlightened operatives. A trained scientist is too valuable a resource, and too important a mind, to risk with such crude and ultimately self-destructive measures.

The vast majority of Technocratic recruits instead come from the ranks of Empowered scientists or operatives who have previously had Technocratic contact. When a scientist achieves an incredible breakthrough, when an operative realizes his potential to change the world, or when the spark of inner Genius speaks to the formerly Quiet Mind, the agent is already on the way to Technocratic understanding. With the sympathizers established throughout various groups, research institutes, schools, clubs and businesses, it is only a matter of time before such an initiate can be noted, processed and inducted into the true Technocratic circle.

Of course, some newly Empowered people still stubbornly cling to their delusional ways. These "mages" either lean toward superstition or refuse to accept the truths of Inspirational Science. However, such newly Empowered minds are still open to possibility and exploring the range of Enlightenment. If properly approached, they can often be convinced to join the Union since our methods are provable, rational and safe. Even those who refuse to recognize the Union's logical ways can be processed with the assistance of Psychological Operatives and shown the error of their superstitions, and once properly attuned to the scientific mindset, can be added to the rolls of valuable Union personnel.

the initiate is required to defend or explain his works to a panel of Etherite masters, but this text will not go into the specifics of each Tradition's initiation procedures — volumes could be written about the procedures alone, much less the explanation and history of each.

The mention of the Traditions begs the mention of Traditionless mages. How do the orphans become part of their group? There's almost no general description because the Disparates are just that — disparate. Some require a prospective mage to summon a spirit, some accept initiates only if they ask, some perform rituals the Hermetics would be proud to call theirs and some ask potential apprentices to DJ at a certain club and keep a certain number of people dancing at all times. In family groups, birth is initiation enough. And this barely begins to describe the various methods of induction among orphans — suffice to say that there is no one way, and the mages of this group seem to like it that way.

Little is known about how young mages are recruited for Technocratic groups. Some students may be suited for such affiliation from the beginning of their public school careers, but most of the recruits are probably manipulated, twisted or tricked into their initiations. The idea of the clone-scientists' initiation procedures alone is enough to turn one's stomach.

Whatever the procedure or lack thereof, though, all mages with any group affiliation must undergo some kind of test or initiation to become part of the group. It's as much a social custom as an arcane ritual. Even in play groups in kindergartens and departments in office buildings, people must somehow prove themselves interested and worthwhile to associate in any meaningful way with other people.

This supports my theory that all interactions between mages of any sort follow the same set of social protocols that mundane interactions adhere to.

Traditional Initiations

Each Tradition's mentors tend to follow particular procedures in initiation. Though each teacher has specific quirks, most Traditions recognize a specific set of rites in the process of initiation. Here's a quick rundown of what to expect.

Akashic Brotherhood: Chances are, if you're with the Brotherhood, you've already done the monastic thing, or else you spontaneously Awakened and got snagged by some ancient wise Zen master. Akashics often spend several years guiding their apprentices, pushing for special insight and physical improvement at the same time. This means that they rely on riddles, physical tests and the occasional moral conundrum to test their students' awareness. Many new Akashics discover that the outside world is a difficult proving ground for their philosophies. A student is only ready to move on once he has the spiritual foundations that allow him to deal with the outside world from the Akashic mindset. "Snatch the pebble from my hand, grasshopper."



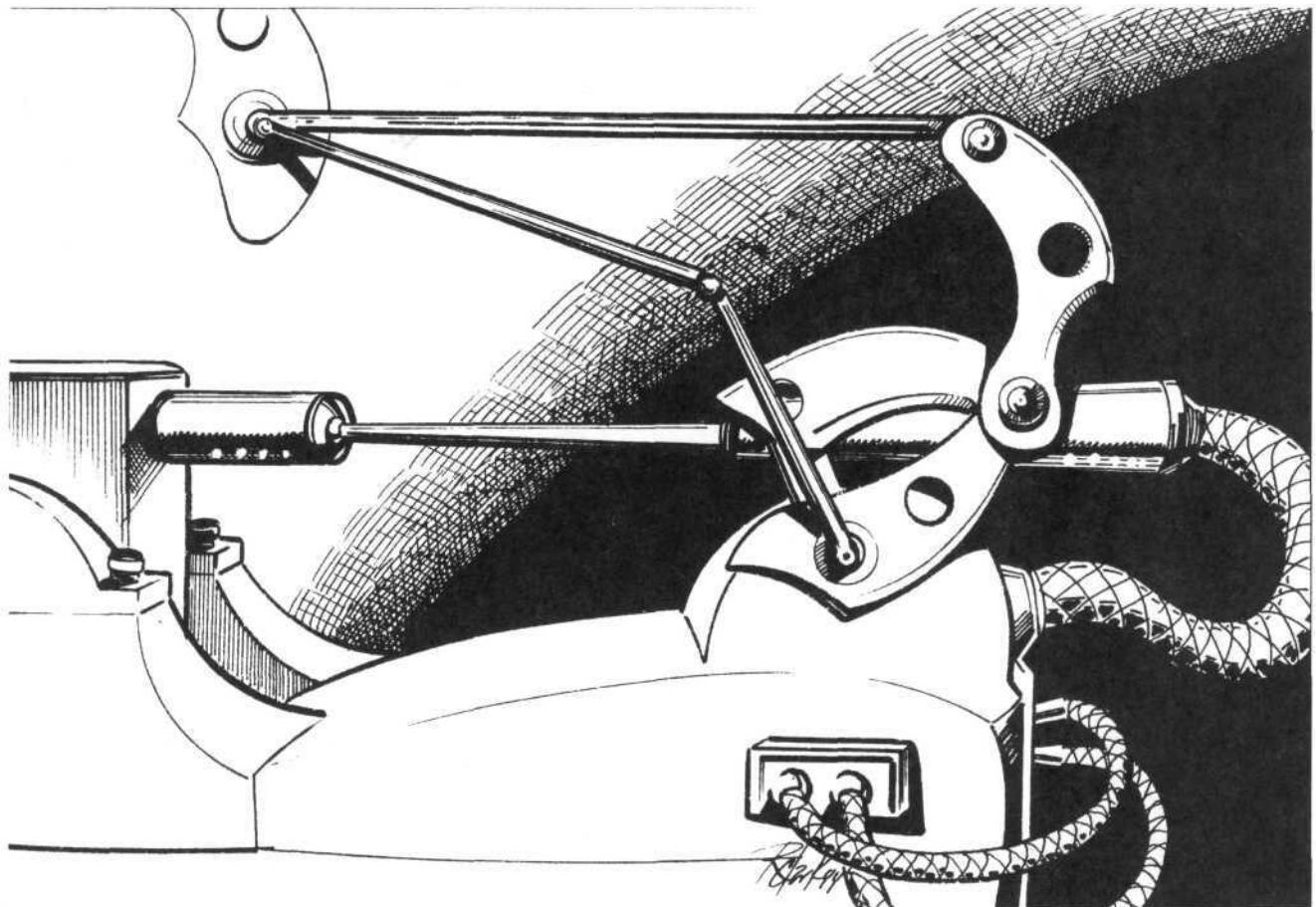
Celestial Chorus: You already saw a bit of the initiation - typically very religious with church-like trappings. Whether it's just mentor and student or an entire congregation, the initiation is an investiture rite. The student becomes a member of the Chorus' "priesthood," responsible for the guidance and protection of others and for the responsible use of power. The mentor "raises up" the student, elevating him to the level that he is supposed to achieve.

Cult of Ecstasy: Where once these folks had complex initiations, most of them have fallen by the wayside. Since they're primarily experiential, an initiation is some sort of shared experience that confirms the student's place in choosing his own new grounds for study. Whether this is a jam session, a steak dinner or mind-blowing sex depends on the mentor's style.

Dreamspeakers: These folks *do* often hold onto their older ritualistic initiations. Depending upon how rigid the mentor is, initiation can be anything from a quick pow-wow with the spirits to a days-long ordeal of vision quests, travel, fasting, sweat lodges, tattoos and even ritual scars or beatings. The initiate has to be cast out from the community, becoming a person apart, one who lives for and is guided by the spirits. Though this brings power, it also makes the 'speaker' one separated from the community, and thus bound only to the greater community of spirits.

Euthanatos: Although many Tradition mages make a big deal about the Euthanatoic "Little Death" ritual, the ones who blabber about it the most are generally those who know next to nothing. Thanatoics do find value in death and want their charges to understand the afterlife and the cycle of reincarnation, so a chat with a ghost is a good way to go. However, it's not always appropriate to send a student screaming to the other side. The Thanatoic initiation focuses more on the moral obligations of their stance. Visiting the Underworld isn't meant to impart the wisdom of ghosts; it's a way to look at death from the other side, to appreciate the cycle of life and to understand why the Thanatoics have to do their job — and what the price is for their works.

Order of Hermes: If there is a more hidebound, obdurate and ritualistic group, they've yet to reveal themselves. Even the bureaucratic Wu Lung can't match these folks. I can't say too much, since the Order keeps a lot of its material secret. However, their rituals are more ordeals of mental endurance and social acumen. The apprentice must pass a particular test set before him by his mentor, once with very specific conditions. Once the apprentice succeeds, he is released and counted as a mage; if he fails, he spends another year in training before trying for his license again.



Sons of Ether: For a group of whack-nut scientists, there is no real organizational initiation. Most Etherites take on a sort of journeyman or master project, making a creation or theory and seeking acceptance among others of their kind. Should the theory draw a good review from *Paradigma*, or the creation be recognized as useful, interesting or plausible within the Etherites' bizarre academia, then the inventor is generally regarded as a full-fledged scientist.

Verbena: Skyclad dancing and ritual sex? I don't think so. Verbena are quite serious about their magic and their bloody-handed role in creation. Although sex and nudity often play at least a part in their rituals, initiation is a pretty scary practice. The Verbena require recruits who are strong in dedication and mind. Therefore, they bring out blood rites and scarification for initiation. Some sort of sacrifice is almost required. Thankfully, the days of human sacrifices are long gone. We hope.

Virtual Adepts: The Adepts are really a "community of cool." Acceptance as a full Adept comes from peer recognition. Because of this, Adepts have to take on daring (sometimes foolish or even suicidal) pranks, missions and jobs to score the recognition of the Elite. Once an apprentice has drawn the eye (or ire) of a few of the Elite, he can expect word of his deeds to spread around. If the apprentice's deeds were cool enough, or just showed enough promise, he may be recognized as a full Adept. Otherwise, he's just a poseur.

Educational Structure

The ways in which masters teach their apprentices vary from master to master. A wide array of factors can affect a student's schedule: school, a job, a family, the student's preferences and tendencies in learning, the master's free time and any number of others. Here, an unaffiliated teacher talks about her preferences and some of the more common practices in arcane education.

The How of It

by Linda Hargraves, RN

Some mages can take their students into their homes and provide them with everything in order to let the student focus only on occult study and practice. This keeps the student close and lets the master keep an eye on every aspect of her progress — this is both good news and bad news. The student gets a great education, yes, but she also misses out on a lot of the things that can't just be taught.

For instance, most people just learning about their abilities have a hard time not talking about it to the people they encounter throughout the day. It's not such a problem when the students are surrounded by other apprentices and people who already know about magic. The problem comes in when they go out and run into the mailman, that nice talkative checker at the supermarket and Aunt Verna who

always wants to know how life is going. I've had to rescue a couple from psychiatric wards — their loving, devoted families are just concerned about them, and the changes just came on so quickly....

It's easy for students to think that they'd never, ever tell anyone, that this is the biggest secret in the world and they're going to take it to their graves. The reality, though, is that it's impossible to teach someone how to be nonchalant and how to simply never refer to something in everyday conversation. Students have to get embarrassed a few times in the beginning — they have to learn by doing. The more they get used to talking freely about their magic, the more likely it is that they'll screw up when they walk out into the wide world. So I like to let my students live on their own, keep jobs, go to school, etc., so they learn how to be a mage in the world rather than a sheltered butterfly.

The opposite approach is equally problematic. Letting a student fumble around by herself trying to figure everything out on her own just begs for some disaster. I've heard of an Asian teacher in New York who, once his students reach a particular point in their training, has their cars and bikes taken away from them. They're forced to ride the bus or walk if they want to go somewhere, and they get jumped. The teacher doesn't think about it twice — one student actually confronted him when he had finally had enough of being mugged. He shrugged and told him that the bus is a dojo on wheels. Alleys are training rings. If he was still getting mugged — much less getting bruised by the muggers — he needed more practice. He told him that it didn't matter whether he kicked the muggers' asses or whether he learned to make them not notice him, but that he had to come up with something before he'd have his car returned.

Also, a student trying to fake her way through life while her mentor stands well aside and observes is a prime target for much bigger predators than muggers. Deprogrammers from organizations no one has ever heard of can snatch someone up faster than is commonly thought. Mages tend to attract all kinds of bizarre activity and people, and it's not guaranteed to be the warm and fuzzy variety of strangeness. Truly twisted mages do exist, and they're always on the lookout for recruits. All a watcher needs to do is look away for a second, and his little experiment in encouraging self-discovery could be gone.

I don't think I need to point out that letting students get killed or worse is in incredibly poor form, but I will anyway. The idea is to help them grow into mages who will go on and help everyone else. Common sense, folks.

There's no real text for teachers, though, and there's obviously not a book that tells students how to learn [Sir Lawrence's note: until now], so there's no right way.

That doesn't mean that there's no wrong way, though. Educational psychology has a lot to offer the mage trying to teach others, if you buy into it. One of the main things that any teacher should understand before going into a lesson-type situation is that people learn differently. Visual learners need diagrams and books. Auditory learners need to be told things. Motor learners need to go through the motions themselves in order to remember how to do something. If the student isn't responding, change the approach. If that doesn't work, change it again until something does work. Some mages think that this smacks of the New World Order's psychological indoctrination techniques, but use what works. If a student seems to benefit from a particular style of learning, go with it.

Actually putting the lesson to the student seems simple, but it takes almost as much finesse as figuring out the student's learning style does. If the student is already in school, most teachers prefer to run their lessons like a second school session in the evening. Whether they do it under the pretense of an after-school job or something like Chinese or Hebrew lessons or seminary, it still resembles traditional schooling — books, homework, the whole nine yards.

Training an older student is more difficult because the adult has responsibilities and a life that gets in the way of structured lessons. In this case, lessons might need to be more spread out, taught in many short sessions instead of fewer, longer classes. Adults also need a very different attitude from their teachers than younger students do. The typical school-age adolescent is accustomed to some condescension from teachers. Adults generally feel insulted or demeaned by such an attitude. (The questions this raises about the traditional school system and its perception of our young people are valid and pressing, but they must be left for another book.)

The length of time it takes to bring a new mage from raw apprenticeship to the first intermediate stages varies. Depending on the student's schedule and her learning curve, the apprentice period can take three weeks or 13 years — there's no set time limit. Ideally, though, the first lessons shouldn't take more than a year. During that year, the foundation for a continuing education should also be laid. There's obviously much more to a mage's education than her apprenticeship.

It's sometimes a good idea to stick with one instructor for all stages of learning, but some students need to have different viewpoints and teaching styles presented to them in order to get as much out of their education as possible. The teacher and student should, by the end of their initial relationship, know whether the student is of the first type or the second. Once the apprentice period is complete, the pair can decide what the student's next path should be.

Wait a Second

Why, in a book supposedly designed for the student, are we talking about teachers?

The teacher-student relationship is complex. It's impossible to separate one from the other, really. The teacher tries something, the student responds. The teacher comes up with a schedule, the student either works with it or doesn't. The way a teacher presents a certain subject might be completely wrong for the particular student, and the combination of the student's frustration at not being able to learn and the teacher's frustration at not being able to teach creates a huge block in both their lives.

So, understanding that the relationship is so thoroughly intertwined, the best way to show a student how her life might be once she gets into lessons is to show her what her teacher is reading, what the teacher is learning from.

If the student doesn't like a particular approach, knowing the alternatives makes it much easier to avoid the thing she doesn't like. Of course, knowing what it is she doesn't like in the first place is the first order of business — reading the teaching books gives her names to put with styles and the ability to identify potentially unpleasant situations.

It's okay to interview a potential teacher before making a commitment. Asking a few good questions before beginning lessons can save a lifetime of frustration, anger and wasted ability. It's true that some student-teacher situations are created with no care for the student's wishes, but with the decline of regimented education, students are finding themselves with more and more control over their environments.



Subject	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
<i>Abnormal Psychology</i>	<i>readpp. 66-125</i>						
<i>Paranormal Activity in the Scientific Age</i>	<i>lab, 4-7p. m</i>	<i>nothing</i>	<i>labbook due with EEG readouts</i>	<i>nothing</i>	<i>TEST</i>	<i>field study</i>	<i>field study</i>
<i>Non-Euclidean Geometry</i>	<i>problems 1-15</i>	<i>class</i>	<i>problems 16-30</i>	<i>class</i>	<i>QUIZ</i>		
<i>Pacification Techniques</i>	<i>read CIA case studies 1-4</i>	<i>critique of case studies due</i>	<i>lecture</i>	<i>read studies 5, 9</i>	<i>simulation training</i>		
<i>Weapons</i>	<i>range</i>	<i>practice</i>	<i>nothing</i>	<i>range</i>	<i>practice</i>		

Other: make hotel arrangements for Sat, Sun. field study, get local authority clearance.

Learning About the Paranormal



You can't just teach someone to Awaken — that has to come from inside the student. It's like music: No amount of instruction can replace raw talent. Before teaching an apprentice to do magic, the apprentice has to have the talent for magic.

This makes it difficult to teach about some of the facets of magic that aren't apparent until Awakening. Avatars, Seekings, the trappings of magical awareness — until the student actually becomes sensitive to these things, any instruction is just so much theory. Most of the Traditions makes some sort of cursory attempt to categorize and teach about the supernatural characteristics common to mages, and some of the ideas are shared here. Just don't get married to them: Jimi Hendrix taught himself to play the guitar, after all.

Avatars

From the notes of Lee Ann:

I'll be honest. I don't usually do church. It isn't my thing. So, it's therefore not surprising that I don't associate much with the Celestial Chorus. Still, when it comes to understanding magic and Avatars, they have a good idea. What follows comes from Celestial Chorus teaching, and I find it to be one of the simplest explanations of what the Avatar is.

You now have a higher self, a self that is attuned to the spiritual energies of the world around you. This higher self is a part of the One, and it is eternal, coming before you and

continuing after you. Even if you never see it manifested, it will always be there, driving you, sometimes in surprising ways. It is a good thing, and the wise mage listens to his Avatar, though with a discerning mind, lest he follow blindly and without understanding.

The Avatar is, itself, simply a shard of the power from Creation's beginning. The formation of the cosmos sundered the essential whole and purity of the One, casting its consciousness down among the myriad of the souls of the world. Driven to find wholeness once more, the Avatars strive to reunite, to feel the pull of the completed Tapestry.

For most, the Avatar is a sleeping angel, a fragment of awareness that will never come to the fore. In others, though — such as yourself — the fragment of the One burns brightly, calling out to the threads of the Tapestry. Your soul binds you to Creation, and through the power of your Avatar, you can sing to that Creation.

Having coexisted with souls of men for eons, Avatars are repositories of the wisdom of ages. No shard of the One could ever fall to such a trivial end as mortal death. The knowledge of the Avatar comes to the mage with the essence of many souls, the learning of other lives and the drive to Ascend. Follow these urgings, and you may well find the path to reunite your Avatar and soul with the One.

Among mortals the Avatar is weak or slumbering, too fragmented to come to its full potential. The truly potent mage, though, is the one who shapes and is shaped by his Avatar, who both seeks its counsel and draws on its strength.



Subtle whispers from the Avatar guide you to enlightenment, but the fragments of the One most whole speak in a louder voice. Brought to action, the truly potent Avatar shines as an angel, clothing itself in a form to speak with you and ready to draw you beyond your limits.

Seek to know your Avatar, and to understand it. The Avatar comes from the One and Prime, and so can never be discarded. As all things flow from the One, so does each Avatar reflect a facet of the Prime. Listen to the dreams of your divine spirit, and the way shall be made clear.

Additional Notes from Sir Lawrence White:

The Chorus has a great deal to speak about Avatars, probably because the Choristers are most heavily influenced by the "divinity" motifs of Avatars. However, they tend to be a little too easily led around by such manifestations — though your Avatar empowers you and advises you, it can also be dangerous, ignorant or difficult.

Many things make up the Avatar. How you relate to it depends greatly upon its nature and yours. Often young mages push themselves for one goal, but are driven to another. Too often, mages fight their Avatars for control, and usually wind up in serious states, sometimes Quiet, sometimes stagnation, sometimes corruption. The mage in constant conflict with his Avatar will not get far. He will find that he must fight to advance his magics, and find that he is seriously below his potential.

Still, the Avatar is not to be followed blindly. Those who do so, while they may well exceed their potential, find themselves easily distanced from the world around them, and sometimes even from other mages. The prodigy finds that while her Avatar opens her readily to advanced magics, those same magics are difficult to perform, often with dire results. Quiet and insanity are never far from these mages.

The best way to relate to one's Avatar is as how one relates to one's teacher or closest friend. Remember that this Avatar is a part of you. Listen to it. Follow it, but take time to question it. Make it "think" about what it is driving you to do. Consider for yourself why your Avatar is driving you like it is. Always maintain that the one with control is you, not your Avatar. You should control your Avatar's actions, but also obey its commands.

Talking to Yourself

I have a few things to add about Avatars, seeing as how I've heard a lot of stories about mages going insane or pushing away their talents when confronted with overactive Avatars.

The Chorus claims that the Avatar is a piece of godform. In their doctrine, it's a bit of the "One and Prime," and it gives a mage a piece of godly wisdom and power.

I take a more practical bent to the Avatar. It's a conduit of souls, pure and simple. Each person leads many lives, but the Avatar is the connection to those lives.

Spotting the Avatar

Most apprentices don't have the skill or wherewithal to spot the Avatar when it deigns to speak or appear — if it ever does so at all.

A more experienced mage, though, can use just a little bit of Spirit magic to ascertain when the Avatar manifests. Spirit 1 or Prime 1 is sufficient to tell an Avatar when it takes physical form. An Avatar that's "talking in your head" can also be determined by a Spirit 1 Effect, though of course Mind 3 is necessary to peer into someone else's mind to determine whether the Avatar's words lurk there.

Avatars also have a tendency to show up in dreams — especially among Technocrats (see the Background Genius in *Guide to the Technocracy*). A mage can "walk" in dreams with Mind magic and determine an Avatar's presence there just like any form of mind-reading, but the mage actually dreaming generally doesn't have enough self-awareness to spot the Avatar magically. A concerned mentor may enter a dreamscape of an apprentice who does not seem to have a strong Avatar, in order to see if the Avatar appears in dreams. Of course, if the apprentice takes time to still her thoughts (and use a Mind 1 Effect) before sleeping, she can shape her dreams enough to use other magic to spot the Avatar.

Given that the Avatar has some sort of awareness of its own, it's not uncommon for Avatars to talk to or even physically manifest to their "parent mages." Of course, this can be startling if you weren't expecting it. Hey, you didn't think this was all going to be easy, did you?

The more powerful the Avatar, the more likely it is to show up in some form. Listen to that little voice in the back of your head. If it doesn't have the wisdom of gods, at least it has the experience of a few lifetimes.

So how do you know when your Avatar shows up? Often, you don't. Virtual Adepts sometimes talk about chatting with their Avatars online, never realizing that it wasn't just another person until much later. Some people actually run into their Avatars in physical bodies, dealing with them like they are real people. That's fine. Your Avatar wants to teach you, challenge you and lead you on a road to enlightenment. Don't immediately assume that anyone who pushes you hard or questions your motives is unfriendly; it could be your Avatar. Ask questions yourself, and figure out your reasons for doing what you do. Your Avatar will make you confront your actions sooner or later (probably sooner).

Some Avatars are quiet; they don't show up until you wind up in a Seeking, and not always even then. This isn't bad. Powerful Avatars have a notorious tendency to get





pushy, trying to lead you around and make you fulfill goals that they had in other lives. A quiet Avatar is the silent partner in your relationship. However, this means that you'll have to work harder. You can't get answers to Great Cosmic Questions out of a mute Avatar, after all.

When in doubt, talk to another mage — your mentor is usually best, but a mage skilled with spirits and knowledgeable about Prime magic is a good bet. Nobody has all

the answers, but a more experienced mage can sometimes tell when you're Avatar is trying to help and when it's just feeding you bullshit to get you going in its own direction. Remember, just because you can do magic doesn't mean that you have to give up your life. The Avatar isn't you and it doesn't run your body. Treat it like a good, if somewhat annoying, friend. Take its advice and help, but learn when to tune it out.

Seekings

Notes from Sir Lawrence White:

I miss Running Deer, I really do. Of all the mages I've ever known, I would have to say that she was the gentlest soul. Below is from a taped conversation. She was a very spiritual person and had a keen understanding of Seekings. What follows will likely help you out in any Seeking that you must go through. If nothing else, it will prepare you, and that is worth more than you can imagine.

You learn and learn, and at a point, you reach a sort of apex in your path. It's not that there is nothing else to learn, only that you cannot learn anymore at the point where you are. When that happens, you enter a vision quest (what many call a Seeking).



The vision quest can take many forms. You can enter it yourself, but you'll get smacked down pretty hard if you aren't ready for it. A lot of times, your Higher Self, your Avatar, will call you into it. You usually don't have any choice but to follow. I've known a few mages to try and fight it, and I've also seen the mess left behind. Best thing to do is watch for signs that you're ready, and follow your Higher Self when it is time.

The Seeking, as it's usually called, is personal. No one will be there to help you. Your Avatar will test you, tempt you, mock you and sometimes assault you. It is a trial unlike anything you've ever been through. To go through it, you would think that your Avatar did not want you to succeed. This is not entirely true. It's not that your Avatar doesn't

want you to succeed, it's just that your Avatar doesn't want you to succeed unless you're truly ready.

Self-prompted Seekings are not a bad thing. There are mages who have succeeded, and often, even if your Avatar is prompting you, you will enter into the Seeking yourself. However, the more self-prompted it is, the more likely failure is. Magic is not simply about the self, and no mage should make the mistake of believing that she does her work solely for her own benefit.

Failure can hurt, too. The most common result is the state of Quiet, where you are locked into your own mindscape, unable to interact with anything around you. Failure comes when the mage is either not ready for the Seeking, or when the mage is foolish in the Seeking. However, failure brings opportunity to learn. Failing a Seeking is not always bad. It simply indicates that you must still learn and set aside some of your notions.

Your Avatar will test you on your weaknesses and fears, more often than not. Do not expect it to be pleasant, either. You'll have to look at a pretty dark reflection, and it only gets harder as you progress. That makes sense, though, as you are trying to open yourself to greater and greater power. I personally feel much better knowing that powerful mages had to go through personal hells to get there.

And there is no way around it. You mentor cannot help you open yourself to power. Only your Avatar can do that, and it can only happen through the Seeking. Now, I won't say that the Seeking is always a mindscape. That's common, but sometimes it will at least begin in the world around you. I've heard of a few Avatars actually manifesting to put their mages through Seekings. I've also noticed those stories becoming rarer. The Seeking is in that place where mind, body and spirit meet, a place where you can go only rarely, and only to learn.

Essences

Notes from Sir Lawrence White:

Along with her insight into Seekings, Running Deer had some things to say about Essences. Since the Essence drives the Avatar's "direction," your Essence can have a lot to do with Seekings. Though some would consider the point academic, anyone who's experienced an Avatar's pull—especially from an Essence that diverges from your own viewpoints! — can speak to its importance.

The drives of the Avatar usually come in four forms. These forms are called Essences, and they are how we define the Avatars. Bear in mind, though, that this is not the limit of the Avatar. It is only our limit of understanding.

The first Essence is the Primordial Avatar. This Avatar reaches from the beginning of all and extends to the end of all. Primordial Avatars carry memories of all their lives with them, like all Avatars, but they often draw from the ancient and legendary powers that formed in the beginnings of time, which is why they are usually called "Old Souls." Mages possessed of

such Essences will find themselves driven by the past (a past that they sometimes do not remember) or the future (a future that they cannot always see). Of all the Avatars, these can be the most powerful because they draw their power from the time when there was still the One. They are also sought highly by the Nephandi for this power and connection. Primordial Avatars bubble with the base elements of creation. A Primordial Essence drives the mage to tear down complex forms and to simplify creation, reducing it once more to the morass. A mage of this Essence learns to give up the things that he values, descending into the pits from which all life springs and to which all things return. Strength of character alone prevents

Whoops!

Apprentice characters are prone to the occasional magical mishap, either by failing to concentrate on their work or by trying to let their foci do all the work for them. The tried and true mage uses foci as tools to focus the will, but he ultimately realizes that it's his strength of will alone that forces the magic to happen the way he wants. Apprentices may not have the strength of mind or the proper viewpoint to realize this.

Besides, the occasional embarrassing flub can be dramatically appropriate. Remember Mickey in *The Sorcerer's Apprentice*?

When an apprentice sets about casting a particular Effect for the very first time, you might ask the player to make a Willpower roll. (Then again, you might not. Magic is fickle like that.) If the roll succeeds, the player goes on with the normal casting.

If the Willpower roll fails, the apprentice either didn't put enough effort into the magic or relied too much on his tools to fill in for him. Roll the magical effect as usual, but it suffers from deviance.

A deviant effect winds up having a slightly altered manifestation from the original intent. Pick one of the spell's components — range, duration, effect level, desired outcome, whatever — and tweak it. Polar opposites are good, but something perpendicular to the original idea is even better. The apprentice unleashes a spell that does mostly what she wanted, but winds up whipping around in some fashion and causing mayhem.

Once the apprentice has successfully cast the particular effect once, this isn't a concern; the apprentice has the right "feel." This is also no longer a problem once the apprentice has a permanent Willpower rating of five or more dots (apprentices who start with formidable wills already have the right amount of concentration).



the mage from seeing such base reduction as the corruption of the Nephandi. In truth, the Primordial rebirth is just as important as any other direction of the universe.

The second Essence is the Dynamic Avatar. This Avatar is driven by change and keeps change as its only constant. The mage possessing it finds that nothing is ever the same day to day, and that if it is, he is overwhelmed with an inexplicable restlessness. These Avatars, like Primordial ones, are also powerful, but not for their connection. Their power comes from pure unpredictability. It is not surprising then that many of these mages become Marauders. The Dynamic Avatar drives the mage to seek change for its own sake; an apprentice who is not careful risks insanity or chaos from such mad quests, and must often exert a great presence of mind to resist the impulses of the Avatar's whims. To move forward, the mage must embrace the Avatar's restless change, pushing beyond the boundaries of comfort or sense to risk new and unknown things.

The third Essence is the Questing Avatar. This Avatar is driven by the need to always search, always seek and always learn. It is not the goal that matters, but the quest. The Questing Avatar never stops, but it has form and goal to its searching. The Questing mage, due to this, usually has an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and the need to experience. The Questing Avatar seems to be very common, especially among the Traditions. Though possessed of a forward drive like the Dynamic Avatar, the Questing Essence pieces together disparate goals into a whole. Instead of searching randomly, the Essence pushes the mage to make sense out of chaos, to seek out meaning through change.

The fourth Essence is the Avatar of Pattern. This Avatar takes its form and power from order. Structure is what this Avatar seeks, and what it pushes its mage to create and maintain. Equally as powerful as the other three counterparts, this Avatar and its mage also have a distinct advantage in this day. Most of the world moves in the same direction, and of all the mages and Avatars, these mages have the least problems with Paradox. These Avatars also tend to be strict and expect others to follow their ways. While the Traditions have their fair share of Pattern Mages, most of them tend to be within the Conventions of the Technocracy. By naming, ordering and codifying reality, the Pattern Avatar turns it into comprehensible form. A mage of Pattern must strive to make sense of the world around him, to withstand forces of change or destruction that would whip away the benefice of tradition and past.

Some believe that there is a fifth Essence, which is the Infinite Essence. I have never seen a mage who did not fit into any of the other categories, though. The Infinite Essence is supposed to reflect the universe itself, in the variety and balance of its many forms. Since Avatars are only tiny pieces of the whole, I do not think that there is an Infinite Essence for any mage. Such an Essence would have to be for the one whole Prime. Maybe someone could have a tiny reflection of such an Essence, but I have never heard of it.

Doing the Magic



Notes from Lee Ann:

Most apprentices find the process of "doing magic" to be pretty daunting at first. Sure, some, want the rush or the power, but the Awakening is as likely to strike an otherwise normal person as to empower some occult fantasy mysticist. I gave Lawrence these notes that I got from some self-Awakened novelist in Indianapolis.

Two major mistakes await those who Awaken to magic for the first time: not trying hard enough and depending upon external forces.

There are no two ways about it. Magic isn't easy and isn't cheap. There's no point in bothering if you're not willing to put real effort into it. Magic can cost you friends, jobs, sanity and even your life — you have to be ready to put them all on the line. Don't expect it to get easier, or more fun, either; magic has its own ways, and you have to constantly work to keep up.

Many apprentices assume that they can "dabble" in magic or that they can somehow give it just a little time. Regardless of how you decide to manage your efforts, understand that magic is part of living. You have to acknowledge it *any time*, not just when you decide to sit down and study or "cast a spell." Magic will make you wake up at night with screaming fits, it will turn on you when you haven't done anything and it will flit away when you need it most.

The *only* way to control magic is through your will. Magical forces can be guided, coaxed and cajoled, but ultimately, it's a fickle hand of fate and you have to drag it into the direction you want. Every time you set up a ritual or a spell, commit to it like your life hangs on it — anything less and you'll suddenly find that it's moving in ways you can't stop, or that it doesn't want to work at all. It's not about how much you practice or how much you care or how much you visualize — it's about how much effort you put in all around.

This leads right into the second problem: relying on external forces. Sure, there are some bits and pieces of self-contained magic out there. You can pick up "magic staves" and crystals that hold magical energy. Despite this, many apprentices believe that the trappings themselves are the sole source of power for their effects. Although your trappings and rituals are important, remember that it's *you* who makes it happen. A robot going through the rituals wouldn't make anything happen. A clever monkey pointing the stick can't cause the spell. When something breaks, screws up or falls over, get over it and keep going. Your own will is the single most important factor here, and the tools just help things along. Maybe they guide your magic, or they pull together mystic factors. It doesn't matter if you're not in charge. End of lecture.



Chapter Three: Life as an Apprentice



*Woke up, got out of bed,
dragged a comb across my head.*

-The Beatles, "A Day in the Life"

It's important to remember that even though your apprentice is caught up in learning how to use arcane forces, speak forgotten languages, build Umbral hotrods or just how to sweep the chantry floor properly, the outside world goes on. Very few apprentices have the fortune to study in a Horizon Realm these days, and the past few months have seen most of those students sent back to their earthly chantries or homes.

So, how does a typical day in the life go? An apprentice still needs to support himself, eat, sleep and interact with his friends and family — plus, balance all that with his magical education and its inherent secrecy and risk. This may take finesse, but it certainly can be done.

Life in the Books

Even though apprentices' experiences differ in more ways than they resemble one another, there are a few things that are common to all beginning mages' education. All must learn to use and control their magic, or it could destroy them. All must somehow practice, whether it's in a care-

fully shielded workroom or on the spur of the moment. The lessons cover a variety of things; listed here are some of the most common topics and praxes.

Formal Courses

Formal courses of study, usually offered by the Technocratic Conventions, occasionally offered by the Traditions

Team Teaching

Though this section refers to a single teacher per pupil, some students are fortunate enough to have several different instructors who operate much like high school or college courses. Each master teaches a separate subject or oversees a particular activity, and the student is allowed a broader array of perspectives and personalities to work with.

This multiple-instructor setup is actually infinitely preferable to just one teacher. It lets the student experiment more with different ideas and encourages critical thinking, as he is presented with options and the ability to choose which approach or opinion he agrees with most every day. Because of the relatively small number of mages accomplished enough to really instruct apprentices, though, this situation is all too infrequent. Storytellers and players should feel free to include this option in their chronicles.

and rarely held by a very few groups of orphans, are the easiest to explain. The things considered germane to an apprentice's education are carefully outlined and generally backed by years of tradition, so there's very little question about what a new member of the group needs to learn.

History

The Traditions in particular place great importance on the history of their own group and of imagery in general. The name itself — Traditions — demonstrates how the groups define themselves and how they teach magic. An apprentice can expect to learn where her group originated, how its practices developed and what changes have come over the course of time.

The history of the Council of Nine is also standard fare for an apprentice's history class. Depending on the student's maturity level, these lessons can be as detailed as postgraduate courses or as simplistic—and jingoistic—as third-grade American history. The necessity of the accords against the increasing threat by the Technocracy are emphasized in the latter example, whereas the more advanced students may be given factual data and asked to draw their own conclusions.

Great conflicts and alliances with other Traditions or groups are often included in the history lessons, which tends to be a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the students learn how to avoid certain mistakes and how to remedy certain diplomatic situations, but on the other hand, they learn who the bad guys are. Dogma is responsible for much of the squabbling between Traditions and between Conventions—it's difficult to get beyond the lessons drummed into one's brain for the entirety of one's schooling.

The history and, theoretically, the metaphysical underpinnings of the group's magical approach make up a good portion of an apprentice's lessons. At the same time that the student learns to create effects, she learns — again, theoretically—why the effect works. (In game terms, this is the ideal and natural time for a character's paradigm to be given its foundation. A completely untrained character is more than likely to believe her teacher when the teacher says that she can't sense Life energy without smearing sacred ash over her eyelids — the character has no basis to believe otherwise.)

Besides the apprentice's inexperience, the fact of the teacher's position in the first place reinforces the transference of paradigm. An older, wiser, more accomplished and respected mage is instructing the initiate, and it's common to accept at least the first few lessons at face value.

Of course, this tendency to believe and accept dogma creates all kinds of potential conflicts. Just as most students accept what they're told in the beginning, they also come to question their beliefs as they advance. Situations that call an apprentice's paradigm into question early on in her career can make for some incredibly deep, multi-layered intrigues. Or what if his superiors call the master on the carpet? The resulting confusion or feelings of betrayal can lead students

into all kinds of adventures as they try to find out what the truth is, or rebel against the system that misled them.

Craft Skills

By craft, we mean the craft of magic. Craft skills are the skills that pertain specifically to the apprentice's magical career. Languages like Enochian, Latin and Sanskrit are good examples of craft skills; technology-minded mages might learn lab procedures they'll only implement with their special projects. Do also counts as a craft skill, even though it is both the vehicle for Akashic magic and the magic itself.

Apprentices can expect to spend most of their time learning and practicing these craft skills. Because they make up the foundation of the actual mechanics of magic, according to their respective groups, the skills are paramount. History is important, but compared to actually knowing how to chant in Enochian or drum oneself into a vision-trance, it's gravy.

It's entirely possible that an apprentice will begin to learn craft skills before she ever finds out their applications. Most Choristers, for example, begin to sing and to train their voices long before they understand how to affect the material world through song. It may even be wiser for an apprentice to thoroughly master the mundane aspects of a craft skill before the arcane aspects. Better, perhaps, to only tackle one thing at a time. Once the student is confident that she won't stumble over the syllables of a complicated Enochian passage, she can go on to learn the true meanings of the words and their resonance.

However, there are other skills involved in being a mage that have nothing to do with arcane languages or martial arts. For instance, how is an apprentice supposed to know where to get the supplies for her teacher's next major working? Knowing where to find things, who to ask about other things and what sorts of things to look for in the first place is not particularly intuitive.

As the apprentice runs errands for her teacher or accompanies him on weekend-long searches for just the right thing, she picks up these kinds of skills. She also begins to make contacts, establishing herself in the network of people that can help support her when she's ready to work on her own.

Despite all of the advantages for the apprentice, errands are also particularly handy ways to get initiates involved in unusual events. New acquaintances, whether they're antagonists or allies, can just happen upon the group as they're out shopping or researching; new plots can crop up over Mr. Ling being out of the one particular root the master needed. New sources of information can be just sitting there on the counter for anyone to pick up. Mages seem to run into such things by coincidence....

Tools

Most mages use material tools that focus their energies and enable them to create magical effects. In some cases,

the mage can't create effects without her focus — either she hasn't mastered her Spheres sufficiently or she just doesn't believe she can work without the tool. The belief in the necessity is enough to make it true, and the mage is bound to the focus as long as she believes she is.

Such potentially powerful tools don't just drop into the mage's lap. Many foci must be handmade by the user herself. Others already exist in a usable form, but they need to be dedicated, calibrated or otherwise prepared for use by the individual mage. A few foci, like song, dance and meditation, are intangible, but the techniques must be learned and practiced in order for the mage to employ the focus properly (see Craft Skills, page 46).

Once the apprentice has begun to grasp the basics of what a focus is and what it's for, she can begin to create one for herself. Most masters require their students to do everything by themselves: find the materials; prepare the materials; carve, forge, paint or build the tool and empower it. It's not uncommon for a teacher to oversee the creation of the focus, though, and most students have had at least one attempt rejected.

If the tool is already in a usable form, the apprentice must usually put some energy in it to make it her own on a metaphysical level. The effort can be put into sharpening a blade, stripping and restaining a staff or wand, cleaning a pistol or just using the tool so often that it becomes an extension of its user. This kind of focus may be given to the apprentice at any point during her study. Some masters believe that the more time a student spends with her magical tools, the more familiar and adept she'll become with them. Other masters prefer to wait until the student has a passing familiarity with magic before presenting her with such a gift.

Praxis

When a newly Awakened individual gets to be an apprentice, she gets to learn how to do cool spells and stuff, right?

Wrong.

Actually practicing magic isn't something an apprentice gets to do immediately. In most structured, traditional systems, the master requires certain things before he will even begin to teach the student how to do anything arcane. First, the student must have the requisite Craft Skills. Then she needs to have a certain amount of control over her will, an amount the master generally determines rather arbitrarily. Some masters require their students to pass a barrage of mundane tests; others require only the most basic familiarity with a few Craft Skills.

Whatever the case, the student is likely to be surprised by the fact that she isn't going to be able to throw fireballs or grow perfect clones immediately. She's likely to be even more surprised that when she does begin to practice magic, it's not as exciting as she anticipated. In game terms, the first dot in a Sphere is solely perception-based. Until the

student gains a greater understanding of her abilities, she's not going to be able to affect much of anything with magic.

However, these first steps are nothing short of miraculous for someone who's never experienced anything like magic before. How amazing, how wondrous it must be to look at a person and actually see the glow of life, all golden and green and bright, flowing through his body. How astonishing it must be to examine a machine and know exactly where its weak point is — how exhilarating it must be to tighten just the right nut and tweak just the right thing and then know, without a doubt, that the problem has been fixed.

For all that the lessons might be boring at first, the instant the student makes her first breakthrough and really sees what's going on in the world is worth every second of every boring class. That moment is much like Awakening, but this time the apprentice is in control and knows what's happening. The way the sensation manifests itself might be unexpected, but the fact that the apprentice has begun to sense things outside the normal range of human perception is not.

Then after the first great step, the learning process goes back to being less than amazing. The student needs to learn to use her new skills easily and at will, rather than only after great preparation and concentration. And the only way to achieve that is to practice. Practice examining birds to determine whether they're sick or just scared; practice recognizing the teacher by his mind before he comes into the room; practice placing a penny on the exact same dot in a 1000x1000 grid 50 times in a row without looking; practice meditating until a five-ring circus, Winona Ryder and Brandon Lee's ghost together couldn't break the concentration; practice ringing a gong every 3 hours, 17 minutes and 43 seconds precisely... the list goes on and on. All of it is good for the student. Little of it can be called fun.

Of course, the lessons do get more complex as the process goes on. Students don't do well if they're bored out of their skulls all the time. (Although boredom can lead to some creative pranks and some good lessons as a result, the benefit just isn't enough to warrant a master letting his students lose their edges and their desire to keep on learning.) Once the apprentice has learned to use her abilities smoothly, she can begin to learn how to apply them in more practical situations.

The practical lessons can take several forms. Some masters present their lessons in a chemistry lab-type situation, giving the student a question or puzzle to answer and a variety of materials with which to experiment in order to find the solution. Others take a more hands-off approach, letting their students roam at will and learn through direct, real-world experience. Most teachers use a combination of the two approaches and throw in their own ideas as well.

Both approaches, as discussed in Chapter Two, have their advantages and disadvantages. The more controlled situation is certainly safe, but it doesn't do much for the apprentice's real-world skill. The real-world situation teaches



an apprentice how to deal with the mundane world, but it doesn't do much for her base of theoretical knowledge. More importantly, the latter approach can be dangerous. Real-time situations are rarely life-threatening for students in structured groups — the master is often close at hand to rescue his protege.

When the student has mastered the perception-based skills and made the first steps toward being able to control things, if only slightly, she is often considered to have left the base apprentice phase of her education. The practice, however, goes on — for as long as the mage continues to learn, she's going to have to practice. Only when the budding mage can *control* the forces that she can sense is she ready for initiation, and for recognition.

Informal Courses

Beginning orphans have things a little harder than apprentices in structured groups do. Their educations are rarely planned out; it's considerably harder for a young student to find himself a teacher among the Disparates than it is for a student looking to the Traditions or the Conventions. Typically, learning from a Disparate isn't a matter of looking for one — it's a matter of having the proper mindset and cultural background, and then being found by an appropriate Disparate. When the apprentice does find himself an orphan to learn from, chances are that the teacher won't be as powerful or schooled as a Tradition or Convention teacher. (That is not to say, however, that orphans aren't as experienced or as knowledgeable as their counterparts — on the contrary, orphan instructors are often more experienced and wiser in the ways of magic in the larger world.)

Life and lessons are both more scattered and more intense for orphan apprentices, and the way the student learns is very different from the traditional course of education.

Schoolin'

Orphans rarely have any kind of formal instruction in occult history or language. It's just not applicable to many aspects of life as a mage who's essentially on his own as far as other mages go. However, some more scholarly students find information for themselves. Regular libraries have an amazing amount of material available about paranormal activity, witchcraft and other topics that a student might find interesting and useful. Most of the texts that discuss the specific history of Enlightened society or particular groups like the Traditions or the Conventions, of course, don't exist outside the keeping of the particular groups, so an unaffiliated apprentice is mostly out of luck in that arena.

Again, though, the information available at any library can be more than enough for an orphan to work from. Several well-known Disparates (Penny Dreadful, for example) have built entire paradigms based on fairy tales, myth and folk knowledge. The apprentice's lessons can very

easily consist of hours spent with his nose buried in interesting books, as opposed to the dry stuff many Tradition-oriented apprentices have to read.

Similarly, few independent apprentices learn much about the theory behind their magic. In many cases, there really isn't any to learn about — just the fact that it works is enough, and they're mostly more concerned with how than why.

There is an exception to that statement, though. Technomancer orphans often know exactly why their arts work, on a material and physical level. Instead of reading fairy tales and myths, these apprentices soak up theoretical mathematics texts and journal articles devoted to highly unorthodox and experimental physics. Technology-driven apprentices are the most likely of all orphan students to group together and share information, lessons and tricks, but that's really not saying much. The same bickering, cattiness and infighting that goes on in un-Awakened scientific circles — mathematicians snubbing physicists, both of them snubbing tinkerers and gearheads, computer scientists snubbing everyone else while the hardware people snub the software people — plagues groups of Awakened students.

Lessons

Among orphans and their teachers, lessons take all kinds of shapes. In general, though, they tend to fall into two categories: lessons with a little bit of guidance and lessons with no guidance at all. Most independents actually get both kinds at different stages in their education.

At first, when an apprentice Awakens as an orphan (which really only means he Awakens with no one around to help him learn), his lessons are most definitely of the latter variety. For example, no one will be around to mention that if he does something blatantly magical or talks about something that he couldn't normally know without extra help in front of people, it's going to *hurt*. So the hapless student gets smacked by Paradox, and he doesn't make that mistake again (assuming he survives).

Once the orphan finds someone to help him learn, he might get steered around mistakes like being obvious about his magic. However, that doesn't mean that the teacher is going to sit him down and explain exactly how to hone his skill and take control of the magic. The teacher might be able to teach him how she mastered her own abilities, and she might be able to offer some exercises that will help him calm down or focus, but she's unlikely to be able to give him any hard guidelines.

Orphan teachers are most often able to offer specific lessons, as opposed to the general theoretical lessons of more structured groups. The teacher might be able to teach the apprentice how to figure out how to open a lock, for example, but she wouldn't be able to teach him how to assess mechanical devices in general. The general applications of specific lessons are left up to the apprentice to figure out.

The Basic Difference

The simplest, cleanest way to describe the difference between most, though not all, orphans' education and most Tradition and Convention mages' education is in terms of the teachers' approach to lessons. Tradition masters usually use deductive logic and teach their students to think deductively. Orphans tend to use inductive logic and teach their students to think inductively.

Whoa — what was that?

Arguments and approaches to problems can be divided into two basic types: deductive and inductive. Deduction is the process of basing arguments on established laws or accepted principles. It moves from the general to the specific. For example, this is a deductive argument: Paradox is always incurred when a mage performs blatantly magical acts in front of Sleepers, so throwing a fireball in the middle of Times Square at noon will cause the mage to gain Paradox.

Induction is the process of drawing general conclusions from specific instances, and it moves from the specific to the general. An example of an inductive argument is this: The last three times I did anything openly magical in front of non-mages, I got slapped by Paradox; therefore, doing openly magical things in front of non-mages incurs Paradox.

It seems like the same argument, and it basically is. Both processes have at their core at the same idea: Vulgar magic in front of witnesses creates Paradox. The only difference is the way the thinker came to the conclusion. Both processes are valid, and both are equally likely to come up with a wrong conclusion—or a correct one.

The Traditions are much more likely to use deductive logic because they have a strong background in magical history and study. Mages have been researching magic for as long as there have been mages at all, and the Traditions have access to the results of centuries of that research. They're familiar with the laws of magic and can fit almost anything — correctly or erroneously — within those laws.

Orphans don't have that body of knowledge. There's no central place to keep the records, there's no group dedicated to preserving it and, because of the very nature of orphanhood, there's no way for an individual orphan to know the knowledge exists. Orphans rely on their experience and their friends' experience to guide them. As often as not, their way of thinking leads them to the correct conclusion.

So that's it. Pretty simple. Until you get into mad mages and abduction — if I throw a fireball in front of Sleepers, Times Square will get Paradox — but that's another topic for another book.

Lessons are considerably more lethal for orphans than they are for other students. Because orphans often have little guidance, it's easy to get into really sticky situations, and the students can very easily lose their cool. Whereas lessons are fairly well thought-out for traditional apprentices, orphans usually learn their tricks on the fly. When the mage needs to do something, he must either come up with some way to do it or fail. There's very little in between for orphans, even if they have teachers.

Though their magic may be spur-of-the-moment, orphans are not exempt from the practice rule — that, of course, being that the best way to get better at something is to practice. Independent apprentices spend time practicing their techniques, just like other apprentices. They also spend time creating tools, though not so much as traditional apprentices might.

Tools, to the unaffiliated apprentice, are often chance finds — though as mentioned earlier, there's no way to generalize about orphans. Some independents discover a design in a book and then build or create it for themselves; others are just struck by inspiration and keep the products for their own use. In general, an independent mage will come across a neat little knife or an outfit that's just like the one Samantha wore in *Bewitched*. By using the object and attaching significance to it, the orphan effectively makes it his own and skips the formal dedication step.

The general rule about master-apprentice life as an orphan is that there is no general rule. The specifics of the situation are entirely dictated by the individuals and their circumstances — a caveat that applies to Tradition or Convention apprentices, but they have at least some history and habit to start with, whereas orphans are often making it up as they go along.

Paradigm

The structure of the student's lessons not only determines how his education functions but also how he comes to understand magic itself. The master, implicitly or explicitly, teaches the student about the mechanics of magic — basically, the master helps create, destroy or reinforce the student's paradigm. Everything a teacher says or demonstrates contributes to her student's paradigm. Showing him how to use a knife, what the names of the Spheres are, even acknowledging that magic exists — everything she does creates paradigm. Even if the creation involves learning what doesn't work, the teacher-student relationship defines the student's paradigm (and the teacher's, but again, another topic for another book).

Existing Paradigms

Some apprentices, both orphans and传统inals, come into training with preconceived notions about how magic is supposed to work. Often, the apprentice was picked out before he Awakened and identified as having potential.

Someone gave him books or began to actually instruct him in the occult, and a structure was laid in blank territory. The Order of Hermes and the Technocracy in particular tend to begin training potential initiates before they actually Awaken. Once the student does realize his ability, the teacher has much less work to do in the beginning of his lessons, because the two already have a common base of knowledge — terminology, shared concepts and agreed-upon limitations.

Some apprentices will have developed ideas completely on their own. These types of paradigm are often gained through books or stories, and they're nothing if not eclectic. Because the books available in mundane libraries rarely deal specifically with true mages, lessons are a little more difficult for both the student and the master.

In the latter case, the teacher has two basic options. She must either learn to understand how the student perceives magic and how the student uses his tools or break down the student's ideas completely, then rebuild his paradigm from scratch. Learning to understand the student's ideas is easier on the student, certainly, but it is often extremely difficult for an advanced mage to accept a new paradigm. Even if the master does come to understand the student, problems arise in translation. A teacher might be able to explain how to see the molecular structure of an object through a microscope, for example, but not through an infrared filter.

Breaking a student's paradigm down completely involves an immense amount of work and, usually, an immense amount of pain. It may be easier for the teacher to inscribe her techniques and ideas on a blank slate, but the damage done to the student ought to give her pause. Some masters are able to break a student's paradigm through subtle questions and prodding, even Mind arts, but most use more familiar brainwashing techniques. The teacher must find a way to tear apart the preconceptions that the student holds dear. Unfortunately, since such notions are often based upon very vital life experiences, this can be quite a shock as the student is unceremoniously dumped into a totally different worldview. Many students can't take this sort of sudden change (especially right on the heels of the Awakening), and so must be slowly guided into broadening their paradigms to accept new ideas instead of rejecting all of their former worldviews completely.

Blank Slates

Compared to students who come preprogrammed with ideas about magic, apprentices who have no idea how the whole thing works are putty in a master's hands. The master may need to take some extra time to explain the most basic premises behind magic — you can control these effects, there are more people like you, there are names for these specific things — but she can ensure that the student will understand everything she wishes to teach him in the

future. Essentially, she can mold his mind into any shape she cares to.

This has many advantages, but it also has some serious drawbacks. The master may not need to spend time correcting any mistaken beliefs, but the student will be less flexible in his conceptual framework because he doesn't realize that there are other ways to think about things. Also, if the master's approach is at all skewed or unusual, the student will absorb it and suffer whatever stigma goes along with it among Awakened society. The potential for an apprentice to develop a severely twisted and limited paradigm is very real.

For example, a high school student who is good at physics but not completely dedicated to it — he plays soccer and has a group of friends he hangs out with regularly — might be encouraged to Awaken by his physics teacher. The teacher convinces the student that the laws of physics govern not only his lab experiments but his social relations as well. The particular curve described by a specific particle of light at one point in its graph interacts just so with the same type of particle being radiated from the other person, and plug it into this scope and *voila!* — instant Friendship-o-Meter.

The student has always wanted to be popular, so he relies more and more on the teacher's device. It seems to work, so he asks the teacher how physics explain other aspects of his life. Slowly, the student is encouraged to depend fully on rather cracked technology. When he Awakens, the Sons of Ether have a new apprentice.

The teacher effectively took a normal high school student who happened to have some talent and made an Etherite out of him. She took his natural inclination and played upon it, slowly introducing her paradigm and leading him down the path she desired for him. The introduction of the paradigm is crucial — it can determine an apprentice's entire existence as a mage.

Once a common paradigm has been established, the teacher can begin fleshing it out and training her student in the use of foci and in the theory and applications of the nine Spheres.

Foci

The teacher's concept of what foci are and how they are to be used — her paradigm — completely defines how the student is going to understand tools as well. The very fact that the teacher, and by extension, the student, believes that foci are necessary or helpful is a part of the growing paradigm. The student may come to believe that he no longer needs the tools, but the paradigmatic belief in foci is already set.

Many spontaneously Awakened apprentices experiment with different types of foci or approaches to understanding magic before ever meeting up with their teachers. These paradigms are determined more by the apprentice's preference than by a teacher's direction, but the paradigm is still established. The choice of focus or the conceptual framework

The P Word

Paradigm is at once the most powerful and the dirtiest word in *Mage*. A character's paradigm is supposed to be his guiding principle, his worldview — everything a mage says, does or thinks somehow fits into his idea of how the world works and how magic works. But just try to talk to Mage players about paradigm, and the discussion becomes the proverbial shitstorm.

That said, understand that this book is not designed to mandate your character's paradigm or even whether you use the idea or not. If you don't need no steeenkin' paradigm, that's fine. The ideas that are being laid out here — that a student's education is inextricably linked to his teacher's presentation and concept, for one — can be applied to less controversial aspects of your character.

Paradigm is also inherently flexible. If your character's idea of the world hinges on his absolute refusal to accept anything anyone tells him, read all this with that slant. However you want to manipulate the general guidelines set out here is good with us. This is just a base set of suggestions — if you like them, great. If not, at least we've given you something to reject and, with any luck, moved you toward something you like better.

Essentially, take all this and fit it into your own paradigm. Do with it as you will.

is largely a matter of the initiate's experience, situation and comfort level. For example, a young black woman from rural Mississippi is unlikely to find a broadsword useful as a focus, but she may think a knotted branch is just the thing to help her sense her grandmother's spirit.

The teacher's response to an individually gathered set of beliefs serves to define it further. If the teacher reacts with disgust or ridicule, the student's attitude about his tools will change, and the tools may become less useful to him as his paradigm adjusts to his teacher's beliefs. If the teacher is willing to work with the student's existing paradigm, it's strengthened by the validation offered.

Spheres

The use of the Spheres is very little different from the use of foci. The master's paradigm acknowledges their existence, and she initiates the student into the idea of nine separate areas of magical influence called Spheres. The student's paradigm adjusts to accept the idea.

The way the teacher explains the Spheres to the student also adjusts the student's paradigm. From the name to the exercises that develop the student's mastery of the Sphere, the entire educational experience shapes the student's mind. In many cases, the master teaches the use of a Sphere only as she knows it instead of explaining both the way she knows it and the ways others use it. The student is then asked to swallow the teacher's paradigm whole. He may learn other



ways to use or understand the Nine Spheres later, but to begin with, he's usually given only one perspective.

Resonance

Since many students learn large amounts of their magical practice from a single mentor, apprentices often develop particular quirks of magic or behavior that reflect their mentors' methods.

Magic tends to pick up the emotions and motives of its users. After all, magic is ultimately will given form, so it makes sense that the power behind that will also pushes the magic. A mage who learns to do magic by visualizing a point of light and shaping that glow through his "light of inner compassion" may well pass that method — and its side-effects — to his students. An apprentice's effects, then, often carry not only the apprentice's personality, but a little bit of the mentor's methods.

In the course of study, a mentor may show an apprentice how to perform a particular exercise, complete with side-effects from the mentor's resonance. Without any template against which to compare the effect, the student may well assume that those side-effects are "normal," and generate them, too. A discerning mage can even figure out who mentored a given student, simply by looking for telltale sorts of resonance.

If It Doesn't Work

It's entirely possible that a student just won't be able to do things the way his teacher does them. Some tools or ideas simply don't work for some people, and students don't always understand or accept their teachers' methods. If the player feels that the teacher isn't presenting something in a way his student would understand, it's perfectly understandable that the apprentice just wouldn't be able to use the focus, create the effect or use the technique that's being demonstrated until it was presented in a manner more consistent with the apprentice's paradigm.

On the other hand, this shouldn't be taken as license to reject a lesson simply because it isn't phrased perfectly to the student's specs. The apprenticeship should help the student (and the player) to come to understand the student's paradigm and its flexibility.

How to Hold a Day Job

Learning to be a mage is a full-time job in itself. Unfortunately, apprentices almost always have either a full-time mundane job or a full school schedule. If the apprentice can't learn to balance the two lives, something inevitably breaks, and it's generally the apprentice himself. With any luck, the next few sections will help keep students' brains from dribbling out their ears like so much tapioca pudding.

Even if it doesn't, the apprentice should at least be awake while it happens.

Time Management

Even if an apprentice wanted to change that there are only 24 hours in the day, he couldn't—he just doesn't have the skill yet. So, he's got to learn how to use his time awake as well as he can. "Time management" may be a school counselor's buzzword or the topic for a corporate awareness class, but it's actually fairly useful.

First off, something has to give. An apprentice can't practice his lessons, go to school, do his homework, sleep and keep playing video games for four hours a day like he did before this whole mage thing happened. And sleep can't always be the thing that gets cut out—sleep deprivation, as most high school and college students know all too well, is a pretty good way to snap.

A good way to create time in a busy schedule is to scale everything back instead of completely dropping one thing. If the apprentice is in school, he might want to take less work-intensive classes and free up some time from doing homework. He could also cut back on extracurricular activities—the newspaper probably doesn't really need another article about the quality of the cafeteria food. For working apprentices, leaving right at quitting time can save a good chunk of time. Also, finding better ways to get to and from work can be helpful—most people would be surprised at how much time they spend in traffic.

Another good way to free up some time is to learn how to actually sit down and do something. Instead of sitting down at the computer to work and getting up two minutes later for a soda, 10 minutes later for a snack, half an hour later to make a phone call, *ad infinitum*, an apprentice may want to assemble everything he thinks he'll need before getting to work. Then, once he's working, he can focus.

Of course, that's the ideal situation. Actually learning to focus is incredibly difficult, and the only way to do it is to work at it. The apprentice may have to go through some stressed months before he really gets the hang of just getting things *done* without getting distracted every few minutes.

It's also helpful to know what kinds of conditions make work difficult and what conditions help concentration. Some people, for example, are effectively paralyzed by the television. If the TV is on, the apprentice is watching it and doing nothing else. Other people need loud music in order to concentrate; still others need to be surrounded by vanilla-scented candles and soothing music.

Avoiding Burnout

All work and no play makes Jack a homicidal boy.

It's good advice. Really.

No one can keep sane, much less content, if he's doing nothing but working. Add the stress of an apprentice not being able to talk freely about a major part of his life and learning things that most people would call impossible to the usual job or school-related tension, and the apprentice's life has just

Recognizing Resonance

Vader is here. I can feel him.

—Luke Skywalker, *Return of the Jedi*

Even when a student goes on to "graduate" as a mage, the old signs of resonance often linger in her style. The mentor's particular approach to magic usually remains the first impression in the student's repertoire, so it's no wonder that a student and master can recognize one another's magical styles, even after years.

A mage may recognize the resonance and "signature style" of a mentor or student, even without trying; old memories simply click into place. Have the player roll Perception + Awareness, difficulty 7, or better still, leave it to the Storyteller. If the roll succeeds, the mage recognizes something nagging about the effect; it's somehow familiar. With three or more successes, the mage recognizes the effect as belonging to his mentor or student's style of magic. While recognizing a mage's particular style usually means paying close attention to the effect, this particular bit of recognition is automatic, and may come as long as the mage is aware of the magic at hand.

A mage can try to "bend out" the resonance in his spells, but it's difficult. The player must score double the successes normally required to generate the effect's area—the normal amount to cover the subjects desired, and then that area again to purge it of resonant taint. Thus, if a mage is trying to affect several people with a spell and the Storyteller rules that it would require three successes for the area, the player would have to score six successes to cover the area without resonant tendencies.

become a giant pressure-cooker. If he doesn't do something to relieve some of the tension, he's likely to break. Relaxing isn't just for fun, although it's better to think of it that way so that playing doesn't become yet another form of work.

Keeping in contact with friends and calling them every now and then does wonders for an apprentice's state of mind. Movies are great ways to get away from work for a few hours, as is going out to a nice dinner that the apprentice didn't have to cook. Whatever works—roller hockey, romance novels or landscape painting—just get out of the house and out of work!

Also, apprentices shouldn't forget their social lives. Other people, though Sartre calls them hell (and sometimes isn't far wrong), are often what keeps people sane. Close friends and family help remind students that, when they Awakened, their mundane identities didn't die. Apprentices are still daughters and sons, employees, pupils and friends—magery shouldn't overtake their existence.

The fact still remains, though, that apprentices do have something extra in their lives that will eat into their time. They have to make some sacrifices and learn to make time for everything, but that's one of the prices a mage has to pay for his talent. That in itself is one of the lessons an apprentice has to learn, and it's not one that a teacher can just assign.



Getting the Most Out of Your Dew

There are going to be times when an apprentice just can't get out of an all-night ritual or has a final he has to study all night for. Then sugar and caffeine become the apprentice's best friend. Some nifty tricks for getting the most bang for the soda bottle:

- Freeze a 2-liter bottle of Mountain Dew (or your favorite caffeinated soda). Be sure that the bottle is no more than two-thirds full when you put it in the freezer, or it'll explode. When it's frozen solid, take it out and let it defrost for about an hour. The syrup will defrost first, and the carbonated water will stay in ice block form. Drain off the syrup; drink it straight. Nice.
- Brew coffee using Water Joe instead of plain water.
- Two words: Jolt Cola.
- Mountain Dew and Tang make an interesting combination. Zingy, fizzy and eye-poppingly invigorating.
- Do the frozen-soda syrup trick, then follow it with fudge-covered Oreo cookies. We dare you to eat more than three.
- Stir the contents of three Pixie Stix into a soda. Drink it quickly. Alternatively, eat an entire giant Pixie stick and wash it down with the soda.

This will generally work, on a purely physical level. Once the apprentice has stopped seeing triple, though, expect him to fall over in a boneless heap. Sugar and caffeine highs are pretty high, but the lows are really, really low.

Keeping a Straight-edge Awake

If an apprentice does not want to ingest anything that could be construed as a drug, caffeine isn't an option. But just being a purist doesn't mean that the apprentice can't stay up past his bedtime. A few suggestions:

- Exercise gets the blood circulating and releases endorphins. Do a few sets of sit-ups or run around the block.
- Get up and do something else for a while. Talk to someone, clean your room, anything.
- Shower.
- Eat a snack, but nothing too heavy. Fruit and vegetables get nutrients and natural sugars to the bloodstream without drawing too much energy away from the brain.
- Meditate for 20 minutes. Allow your brain to relax and refresh itself, but keep a meditative focus in order to avoid falling asleep mid-trance.

If none of this works, napping is an option. It's possible to sleep for an hour or so and get up refreshed, but many people find that it's easier to either just stay awake or go to sleep. It's also easier to stay up late if you're in the habit of doing so: Your body gets used to less sleep and learns to function on two to six hours' sleep. However, expect to crash at some point, just like the caffeine hounds. Sleep is necessary, and your body will eventually shut down on its own.

Turn That Damn Music Off!

As far as game mechanics go, having a student need certain things in order to work can be an entertaining character-builder. One character may love to crank Judas Priest while he studies, but another needs total silence and dim lights. Getting the two to work together is certainly a daunting task for the Storyteller, but the group can be stronger for the alliance. The Storyteller can also use characters' study habits to encourage plot elements: Hours spent alone at a computer or in a library could grab the attention of any number of predators. If the student's master and his peers are used to having him disappear for a while, it's entirely possible that no one would notice that he was gone until it was too late.

The Concentration Merit never looked so good.



It's all well and good to have a lesson plan, a set of courses, a heaping helping of caffeine and a structured paradigm. That goes a long way towards developing a mage's future capabilities. Too bad you can't get the damn kids to sit still long enough to absorb it.

A few rare prodigies Awaken while children — bright and open to the incredible possibilities of the world, without any special prompting. These young hopefuls have a great deal of possibility ahead of them, but they risk perhaps more than any other mage. Most go unrecognized until their later years, and are thus subject to the whims of worldly development. Driven through schools and homes that don't understand their special insights, such children must hide their talents even more than most of the Awakened.

Child mages break all the rules of learning—but what else could you expect? You can't hold a child to a rigorous and demanding schedule. The devices and theories that you've held dear for so long are all equally suspect under the child's simple "Why?" Without formative influences, the child may not know that some types of magic are difficult, dangerous or just a bad idea — and may pull them off anyhow.

The best way to reach a child, of course, is through family. Parents exert more formation over their children than anyone else, save a few select teachers (and, in some households, the television). The problem lies in convincing a parent that your freaky trips to weird places where you study dead languages and look up astrological conjunctions are completely safe and harmless. Parents have enough problems with kids who delve into fantasy and games — asking them to buy into the real thing is almost always doomed to failure.

So how does a child learn? Through exposure, mostly. Without limitations imposed by a particular worldview, the child simply exerts her will, perhaps in the simple fashion

Slackers!

Storytellers should feel free to give their players opportunities to slack off and maybe get in trouble for it. On the other hand, if a chronicle is getting bogged down in magical details and players are getting tired of being in school all the time, as it were, the Storyteller might want to let the characters skip class and do something fun. This option also presents all kinds of potential plot hooks — people to meet, trouble to get into, information to gather... the list goes on and on.

Remember, the focus of an apprentice game needs to stay on the wonder of exploring new magic and new experiences, not on the wonders of the next page of the book.

Child Mages

of rhymes, games, whatever "feels right," and the magic comes or doesn't. Through trial and error, the child discovers the way to open her own magic box, and those tools become ingrained in the child's psyche.

Eventually, of course, a child has to face the fact that others just don't have the talent and insight to do this sort of thing. A few get caught and locked up as crazies; some live on the run, wandering from town to town in search of the next experience; some sublimate their imaginations to the rigorous call of science, joining the ranks of the Technocracy; and, only a rare few are discovered by Traditionalists and orphans, and are taught to direct their skills.

Training the Kid

It's tough enough to get the kids to take out the garbage. How does one go about training a child to a particular magical mindset, especially one that's potentially dangerous or difficult?

In most cases, the important part is to help the child to grow a sense of wonder. Answer questions and ask more. Point out fascinating bits of information about the world. Go for walks in the park, trips to the museum and reading sessions at the library. Once the child understands that there's so much to wonder about, so much to see and do, he will hopefully keep that desire for much of his life. It's important to indulge in activities that the child will enjoy; boring museums on a schedule and abstract art studies that go way over the kid's head will just keep the child listless and push him away. For children, study needs to be exciting and dynamic.

Introducing magic takes a little more effort than mundane study. Encourage the child in small feats. Let the kid talk to his imaginary friend, or use his rhymes and songs, or just see things that he shouldn't. Like any other mage, the child needs to learn caution, to exercise these only around

the right people. That's what a mentor is for — to help direct the child's experience, to make sure that the kid grows up to enjoy and embrace magic, instead of pushing it away or, worse, being killed or driven mad by it.

Putting the Tradition in the Child

Once a child has been opened to the wonders of magic, it's a simple matter to impart the image of a specific Tradition. Children naturally latch onto things that authority figures tell them, if they trust those figures. A trusted

mentor can get away with telling a child that something works, without having to explain it, in some cases. It's even easier than training a regular apprentice!

A good approach is to encourage the child's use of particular foci alongside everyday studies and play. A Virtual Adept may encourage the child to explore the Internet, to check out computer games and crossword puzzles, and to break a few rules for fun. A Hermetic mage may introduce "soft occultism" like Ouija and astrology, to open the door for later studies. Push the child to explore specific aspects of life. Though everyone has natural predilections, kids are often open to exploring new things more readily than adults.

Family and Friends



The flipside to keeping up relations with friends and family is that apprenticeship can and does complicate those relationships. The apprentice suddenly has to spend more and more time away from home, and he suddenly seems more preoccupied than usual. Though dealing with parents and friends can be difficult, it's worth putting the effort in to save whatever moral support an apprentice gets.

While You're Living Under My Roof

Parents are notoriously touchy about their adolescent or younger children spending too much time away from home doing nebulous "stuff." In addition to the time involved, it's entirely possible that an apprentice's parents won't like his new friends — Awakened types don't tend to be particularly average. This is bad enough for most normal people going through the usual puberty difficulties, and a Talented kid has it a thousand times worse.

The first thing to remember is that in many cases is that the student's parents are probably truly interested in his well-being. The old cliche of "we're only doing it because we love you," is actually true more often than movies and TV have us believe. Parents can be a student's best means of support and help if he can just manage to convince them that he's doing something they approve of.

That is the rub. The apprentice may have to learn to lie more convincingly than any convict or actor has ever lied. He might have to create distractions or come up with any number of other sorts of methods of convincing his parents that he's not on drugs or out getting arrested or anything else terrible. Of course, it's possible that he is doing those things at the same time that he's learning about magery, but it's unlikely that he'll want to tell them about it.

(Rather than presenting a laundry list of things an initiate can use as excuses or covers, we'll just suggest a few. Initiates are inventive, and having a student get the best of his parents is

probably a good way to encourage some of the best and most creative solutions a Storyteller will ever run into.)

First, school newspapers and yearbooks are ideal cover stories. The publications can take immense amounts of work and time, so the time spent away from home is fairly well-covered. Also, not everyone who works for the newspaper has a huge byline. A newspaper or yearbook staff is mostly made up of reporters, layout people, and copy editors — and there's very little attention called to them. It's unfortunate and vaguely unfair to the reporters, but for someone who wants to have some concrete proof that he's doing something legitimate, it's perfect. The student can write a few stories here and there, get his name in the credits column or on the byline, put in a few hours in the production process and have an airtight alibi (especially if he's either quiet to begin with or has some friends on the journalism staff who'll cover for him).

Drama is another good cover. It works much like journalism. Get involved in working tech, and there's enough work there to cover all kinds of after-school time. The run of the play may create scheduling crunches, because tech people are always needed then, but it seems like a fair trade compared to weeks and weeks of free time for magery.

Another possible cover is community service. It seems a bit morally bankrupt to use kindness to other people as an excuse to stay out of the house, but it's possible. If there's a Boys or Girls Club chapter in the student's area, the chapter houses make for good excuses. They're deliberately safe and available, and most parents won't complain if their child suddenly develops an interest in helping other kids out. Best of all, the hours are flexible.

The caveats to these methods of deception: First, be sure that the alibi is at least somewhat supportable. Creating something out of whole cloth tends to result in flimsy stories that fall apart at the first hint of investigation. Second, the student could very easily be absorbed into the pastime he's using as a cover story! This may distract or redirect apprentices, though these alibis may develop contacts and expand the apprentice's social webs.



Covering the student's butt isn't the only option, though. If the apprentice's mentor is a friend of the family, he has a real reason to be away from the house. He doesn't even need to lie, really—he truly was with the friend! Unfortunately, this is a rare case. Even easier is the case of the family-tradition mage. What excuse?

The last option we'll detail here is probably the least viable for initiates still living with their families. The apprentice can always try to tell the truth. If he can make it work, this is the best of all possible options, but it's not likely. The parent/child relationship would have to be strong from the beginning in order for the parent to trust the child enough to believe he's actually learning about magic, and most adolescents' relationships with their parents are strained at best. However, if he can get them to believe, he's just opened himself up to new heights of support and assistance, not to mention the fact that the world is probably a brighter place for the parents' belief.

Honey, We Need to Talk

An adult initiate doesn't have the problem of his parents to deal with, but he's really only traded it for the problem of his significant other or his friends. True, he may not get thrown out of the house, but he may find himself alone in it. He may not have to go to school, but he doesn't have the luxury of getting out of work at three every day, either. Like most people, the initiate will find that being a grownup isn't as easy as he'd imagined it would be. It comes with its own troubles.

The time away from home issue is as pertinent to an adult as it is to an adolescent. His significant other, if he has one

usually wants to spend some time with him, his buddies want to hang out, his dog runs out of food and howls all day, etc. If he's married, with or without children, the problem is compounded. Either he has to explain himself like a teenager, not say anything and live with the consequences or tell his family/SO the truth.

Explaining and covering his ass like a teenager is much more difficult at this stage. The balance of a sexual or romantic relationship is more upset by the absence, and trying to cover it up almost always ends up badly. If the apprentice can't lie perfectly, this is a bad option, but it may end up being the only option if he wants to stay in the relationship and can't explain the truth.

The new mage can also try to just ignore the entire issue of his absence. This is another bad option, because he runs the risk of losing his relationship in the face of inexplicable behavior changes. Not only does he risk losing his relationship and his friends, he does so without trying to change it. This course of action leaves relations in unpleasant ends, and the initiate should be aware that he's most likely burning some bridges.

The option that's the least feasible for adolescents is perhaps the best for adults. Telling the truth, if he can get his family to believe it, will gain him support and understanding, just like the adolescent. This will probably take more than just a simple announcement—"Honey, I'm a wizard. For real..."—but it's a good bet. Slow introduction to the ideas involved in being a mage is the most effective approach, and it's the least traumatic for everyone involved. There's also the possibility that someone will Awaken in the process—always a good thing.

Developing a Sanctum

First off, developing a sanctum isn't something that's done with dice rolls. It's like Awakening an area: there's no hard-and-fast system.

That said, a sanctum is basically a place where so much magic has left its mark — its resonance — that the sanctum sort of "soaks up" the prevailing style of magic. The Pattern of the place becomes bent to accommodate the owner's magical style.

Of course, a place's Pattern can only bend with resonance when there's a lot of resonance there. A mage has to do a lot of magic in a place in order to warp it into a sanctum. Resonance comes from emotion and intent, too; an area doesn't become a sanctum just "because I cast a lot of little Effects there over and over again," but rather because a mage constantly uses magic there with purpose.

Some areas are more accommodating than others, too; a place that has a natural predilection for a type of resonance will become a sanctum more easily, and may become more potent. A forest glen does not make a perfect sanctum for techno-wizardry, but it works well for naturalistic magic. Combine the two — natural predilection and the constant wash of resonance — and a location eventually becomes a sanctum.

Apprentices tend to cause their sanctums to evolve without even noticing it. A single place where the apprentice studies or works his magic over and over again may slowly become a sanctum — or it may already be one, if the character begins play with the Background. A lucky apprentice may even inherit a sanctum from a generous (or deceased) mentor.

Hermit Life

The last option that adults have and adolescents don't is the option to withdraw from social relationships. It is possible for someone to just back away from everyone he knows, not go on any dates, not socialize with friends, not go out after work — but it's a bad idea. Part of a mage's life is his humanity. It's vitally important for the initiate to keep up his social ties so that he always knows where he came from and what he is. Some say these ties are part of what allows a mage to be magic, but that has never been substantiated.

However the initiate chooses to deal with his Sleeper companions, he must invest some work into maintaining his social ties. Apprentices have to make time for their friends and families. It's not necessarily going to be easy, but it's as important as learning magic. Sending cards and letters, making phone calls and making special effort to visit friends and relatives are good ways to keep ties up — they're also low-maintenance efforts for high-return relationships.

On the other hand, it's inevitable that some ties will either be severed or dropped as a result of the apprentice's new status. The initiate needs to accept that his life is changing, and people are going to draw away from him as he advances in

his study. His friends may suddenly find him creepy one day and withdraw; his family may call less and less frequently; his children may become engrossed in their own lives. The balance between maintaining social relationships and accepting that some relationships must end is delicate, and many apprentices lose more than a few nights of sleep over it.

Sanctum Sanctorum

One special note when dealing with places to live and practice magic: Though apprentices usually aren't aware of it, locations that become hideouts for a mage generally bend to that mage's will, reflecting her take on magic. These sanctums are highly valued as bolt-holes, laboratories and storage spaces. Programmed to a mage's particular specs, the sanctum can easily accommodate magical effects that might be otherwise out of place.

Most apprentices wind up doing their magic at home, in a private room, away from prying eyes. It's only natural to closet away and study the arcane secrets of the world somewhere Joe Average won't stumble across you and wreck your concentration while mocking your predilections. Thus, apprentices wind up doing a lot of their study and ritual in their own little places — a bedroom, a cellar, a clearing out in the woods, a river fork in a nearby canyon. After enough time, the magic "takes" at that place, and it gets easier to do magic there.

On the plus side, a sanctum seems to flow away from mundane perceptions. Odd as it may sound, a sanctum is a magical place, and so it's hidden — at least a little — from prying eyes. Magic comes a little more easily there, and it's usually less of a problem when it blows up.

On the down side, many a mage becomes a bit too attached to a particular sanctum. Others — street kids or mages on the run — simply don't have the time to spend in one place. A mage who gets used to having a sanctum as a resource may be rudely shocked if the house gets sold or the forest bulldozed. Worse still, since magic has a little more "slack" in a sanctum, it can make an apprentice a bit lazy — the apprentice may expect magic to work without the real effort necessary. This can prove nastily fatal in the outside world.

Overall? A sanctum is a useful place, but don't keep all of your important stuff there. It's a great place to experiment with dangerous or difficult magic, and to get techniques down pat. Like any tool, though, it can be taken away and it can be a crutch, so it's not something on which a mage should always rely.

Dealing With Paradox

Even though apprentices don't have the high Sphere mastery necessary to garner huge amounts of Paradox, magical students do accumulate it. Even at the lowest levels, magic twists reality around and defies the power of the collective Sleeper consciousness, which fights back any way it can. The apprentice needs to learn to deal with Paradox quickly — what is an initiate supposed to say when someone asks him why his hair blows the wrong way in the wind? This lesson is another of the learn-by-

doing set, but this section provides some suggestions so that initiates won't be entirely at a loss for answers.

To begin with, it's a good idea to have the apprentice's master explain exactly what's going on. A student can't deal effectively with something he doesn't understand, and he certainly can't think up an excuse to explain it to Sleepers if he doesn't understand it himself. Also, knowing what's happening will reduce the situation's stress level, keeping the apprentice calm and avoiding panicked outbursts when someone points out the bleedoff effect.

The best way to avoid having to deal with Paradox bleedoffs, obviously, is not to incur Paradox in the first place. Abstinence, in this case, is the best protection. Keeping magical effects coincidental — utterly believable and mundane in Sleepers' minds — avoids gaining the attention of collective reality. The small, unobtrusive effects that apprentices are capable of are generally easy to mask in science or intuition or some coincidence, so initiates should ideally only get Paradox rarely.

Like the sex education teachers we paraphrase, though, we realize that apprentices are going to "do it" anyway. Additionally, Paradox effects have begun to worsen over the past few months. There have been documented cases of initiates and even more advanced mages being physically injured by the force of collective reality. No one who didn't go out of their way to botch things up has been more than bruised, battered and surprised so far, but it seems wise to re-emphasize the idea

of abstinence from all overt magical effects before launching into a discussion of how to explain Paradox away.

One choice for explaining the odd reactions is to avoid explaining at all. Just go somewhere else and hide out for a while until the effect goes away by itself — a little like everyone wishes they could have done a few times while an enormous pimple went away. For most effects that an apprentice could trigger, this is a fairly reasonable solution. Apprentices' Paradox bleedoffs will probably only last about three days at most, but that is a gross generalization. Some flaws tend to haunt apprentices to the ends of their days... (see *A Wizard of Earthsea*, by Ursula K. LeGuin, for an example of a really botched up summoning during apprenticeship.)

The other choice is to come up with creative but plausible explanations. There's no real way to describe how this is done, but many mages have a stock set of rationales that they have been developing since their days as apprentices. Apprentices will probably get inventive with these, but witnesses may scoff at the less believable attempts or otherwise react badly. ("Hey, look! Monkeys!")

Lead Us Not

Once an apprentice has Awakened, he's suddenly presented with an entirely new world of possibility, experience, work and power. Power is seductive, even at an apprentice's level, and it's hard for new mages not to follow one or more paths of temptation. Temptation doesn't necessarily have to be of the biblical sort — there are all kinds of ways an





apprentice can annoy or even hurt other people or get himself into trouble. Trouble isn't even necessarily magical or magic-related — the mundane world is dangerous and subversive all on its own.

Everyday Pitfalls

As we've tried to emphasize here, the mage's relationship with the mundane world is vital to his sanity, happiness and even his magic, and the balance of the relationship is rather tricky. Given that, an apprentice is more likely to get sidetracked, distracted and led astray than he is to find the right balance at first. This isn't such a bad thing; often, learning how not to do things is as important — if not more so — as learning how to do them.

Drugs

Many apprentices, especially orphans and Cult of Ecstasy initiates, struggle with drugs. The Cult of Ecstasy often uses drugs as foci or meditative aids, but it's hard for an initiate to draw the line between using the drugs and becoming their slave. True, the point is to give consciousness over to the experience, and Cultists tend to have more flexibility in their definition of mage life versus everyday life, but even the most hedonistic Ecstatics acknowledge that there is such a thing as too much. When drugs begin to impair the initiate's life, the line is drawn.

Drugs are usually over-romanticized as a part of Ecstatic or Dreamspeaker life. Apprentices generally expect their lives to turn into a cross between Alice in Wonderland and a Grateful Dead concert with some neat magic tricks thrown in. Because the Cult

does little to discourage this perception, it's easy for initiates to get way too excited about their new pharmaceutical experiences.

The reality is that drugs do help Ecstatics and other mages experience things they wouldn't otherwise, but they can destroy a mage's mundane life. Apprentices have to be careful to not let anyone in on the secret of their magic. Many drugs make people talkative or loosen their inhibitions — not a good thing when someone's trying to keep a secret. The danger doesn't only lie in Paradox, though. There are various institutions and groups who would be more than happy to deprogram a kid whose parents had enough money to pay the "hospitalization costs." There are worse dangers, too, the kind that threaten an apprentice's soul, but those are fodder for another section.

Orphans may use drugs to expand their consciousness, but they're more likely to be looking for a way to get away from their talents. Drugs distract people from their lives and their worlds — precisely why they're used as a meditation aid - but their advantage is also their drawback. Though the orphan may forget about his troubles for a while, he also loses the ability to live his life. For those orphans on the streets, dropping their guard like that for too long can be fatal. For orphans living at home, drugs can result in their being fired, thrown out or arrested.

Again, there is an advantage to drug use, and it's most definitely a part of many mages' existence. Keeping it as a tool and occasional recreation is the trick. Apprentices don't have the experience to maintain that balance. They also have the tendency to go nuts when they find out that it's sometimes actually okay to do drugs - it's a lot like the tendency of college freshmen to drink themselves sick for the first few months of school, then lose interest.

Ardent Pedantry

Suddenly the apprentice, just by Awakening, has more knowledge than the average Sleeper will ever have or dream of having. Once he begins studying, his knowledge base begins to exceed that of mortal scholars'. And he can only improve from there. For someone who considers knowledge and detail important, this can lead to all kinds of problems.

Quite a few mages are scholarly sorts, even before they ever Awaken, and they truly take joy in knowing everything about everything — details, trivia, anything, as long as it's interesting. These people generally enjoy sharing their knowledge with others, either through teaching or just everyday conversation. Their actual teaching may end up being more than they originally intended, though: As they're imparting knowledge, they're getting on people's nerves. As they're getting on people's nerves, they're demonstrating how not to interact with others. The other side of this is the teacher who disseminates knowledge and at the same time demonstrates sensitivity to balance and people's social customs.

Facts and information, however they're distributed, may be the currency of the future, but most people don't enjoy having their friends or family lecture them. A mage who's pedantic to begin with is more than likely to have that tendency exaggerated when he begins to study the arcane arts. The increased volume of sheer knowledge he is gaining combined with the feeling that he knows something that almost no one else does creates the ultimate know-it-all.

Suddenly the pedantic apprentice finds his friends and acquaintances scattering when he takes a breath to speak. People roll their eyes when he tries to share his knowledge with them. His listeners' eyes glaze over, and they stop even pretending to pay attention. Eventually, even his friends will withdraw from him — they can't deal with his constant lecturing and his need to add at least one detailed statement to every discussion.

Though he was only trying to tell his friends and acquaintances about some interesting things, the apprentice has inadvertently driven everyone away. He's lost his primary connection to the mundane world, one of the most important things to preserve.

Laziness

Even though an initiate doesn't have the sort of command over his talent that would allow him to perform everyday tasks without moving, he can still be seduced by the idea of that control. The thought that one day he might be able to just wish his laundry done or his rent paid is enough to make him think he can get away with lying around as an apprentice.

There are two major problems with this theory. First, when the apprentice does get that much control over his magic, he usually has long since arrived at the conclusion that it's not such a good idea to alter reality for the sake of one load of clean laundry. The reason that masters rarely use their vast amounts of power is because they understand the consequences — apprentices don't, so perhaps the gradual growth in power is a good thing.

Second, the same problem that applies to drug use applies here because the effects are much the same. Sitting around the house doesn't get the mage's life lived, studies done or friends

kept up with. The beginning mage isn't going to wish money into his account or wish himself into greater understanding. All that takes work. The initiate who lets his drive go once he's Awakened and realized what he could be capable of is actually decreasing his chances of ever getting to that potential, because he just won't make the necessary effort to improve.

The teacher's reaction to a lazy student probably doesn't need to be detailed here. When the master is finished with her student, he'll often wish he were still in the days when having his hands slapped with a ruler was standard punishment.

Over-enthusiasm

Just as it's a bad idea to get too lethargic, it's a bad idea to get too excited about and involved in this new life. Down this path lies abandonment of mortal ties, and that's a bad thing. Unfortunately, this is an easy road to walk for apprentices who had some idea about what they were getting into when they Awakened.

If a student knew about magic before he became an apprentice, it's likely that he thought it was fun, exciting and cool. Honestly, that's not too far wrong, but there's a lot more to it than just coolness. As a result, many apprentices will throw themselves body, mind and soul into their arcane studies and forsake everything else. This risks all the consequences of renouncing Sleeper ties. Plus, it invites something worse: burnout.

Kids with new toys play with them until the toys are tattered and worn, then throw them aside for the next neat thing. Magic can be a new toy, too. The apprentice eats, sleeps and breathes magic for a few months, but then it gets boring, and he's pretty much stuck. It's hard to get rid of magic, and if the apprentice is forced to go on with his study even though he's bored, he could easily burn out on the entire idea. And burnout isn't restricted to just motivation, either. It's not unheard of for apprentices to get sloppy or careless with their practices, lose control and Gilgul themselves completely by accident.

Once again, balance is the key. Magic needs to keep its fascination, but it can't be too remote either.

Withdrawing

If the student isn't allowed to learn anything that he considers useful or interesting, he's likely to pull away from the idea of magic as much as he can. His life as a kid, an adult or whatever else he considers himself is suddenly much more fun and much more interesting than this stupid magic stuff. This caution is as much for teachers as it is for students: Keep things interesting. Keep studies engaging enough to hold the student's attention. Otherwise, he'll just be tempted to back away altogether — honestly, who wouldn't rather play a video game than sit around and copy books all day? Especially when all he's been doing for the past month is copy books and all he has any hope of doing for the next eight months is copy books.

Every student shines off his lessons occasionally, but giving in to that particular temptation too often is a good way to stay at apprentice level for years. The world loses a mage, and the apprentice loses the chance to be something more than he ever would have had he never Awakened. From a bored student's point of view, neither of these things is very

What's the Point?

With all these dangers, cautions and difficulties in becoming a mage, why should anyone want to become an apprentice at all?

It's a valid question. Apprenticeship is difficult, yes. There are dangers, yes. The thing that keeps many apprentices involved is the sheer joy of being magic. It's an essential part of a mage's being, and the feeling of accomplishment and of doing something that's purely himself makes up for the trials. Also, this guide isn't designed to placate initiates and make them feel safe — magic isn't safe. It's supposed to help them avoid difficulty and help them through rough situations in their education.

The unfortunate result of that intent is that this guide might make apprenticeship seem more difficult than it really is. Not all apprentices will have all the troubles dealt with here; a few lucky beginners will have none of these difficulties. Most, though, will have one or two and then run into some difficulties of their own. Always remember that being a mage is an amazing thing — mages have the understanding and the capability to change their lives and others' for infinite good, and it's a wonderful thing to be able to be magic. Being an apprentice helps this process along — with a skilled mentor, the apprentice can (hopefully) avoid some of the pitfalls, have someone to turn to when trouble crops up and learn more than she could on her own.

Don't let the everyday troubles and worries of apprenticeship get in the way of the joy of magic. It's worth it, we promise.

important, but the temptation is to lose sight of the ultimate goal and thus get caught up in mundanity.

Magical Temptations

Apprentices have all kinds of opportunities to get themselves in trouble in the mundane world. As if that weren't enough, they have a whole new set of temptations and pitfalls in the arcane world as well. Though the mundane dangers aren't innocent by any means, the arcane troubles can threaten more than the apprentice's relationships with his friends or even his health. The sorts of temptations he faces as a mage threaten his soul, his life and the lives and souls of the people around him.

Stretching Too Far

Everyone knows the story of the Sorcerer's Apprentice: The student opens his master's spellbook, hoping for power or knowledge or simply out of curiosity, and he does something he's not ready to control. The result, in the Disney version, is just annoying and embarrassing for the student. The result in the World of Darkness is much, much more sinister. Instead of dancing brooms and mops, the apprentice is likely to get hungry demons, vindictive ghosts or a free trip to Malfeas, with all expenses happily paid.

The problem is that apprentices almost always want to know more. They want more power, more knowledge or more excitement. It's human nature to be so greedy, and overcoming the tendency to stretch beyond his reach is an immense task for an apprentice. Even Zen masters need to work at overcoming

desire — is an apprentice supposed to reach that stage immediately? This is one of the two greatest dangers to a student, partly because it's so easy to fall into the trap of desire, partly because the potential result can affect so many people. If the student rips a hole into the Umbra, there's no telling how many people will be killed or injured before someone strong enough to close the rip and deal with what's already been let loose comes along.

Excessive Altruism

Closely related to the temptation to stretch beyond his reach is the temptation for an apprentice to get too involved in other people's lives and try to fix their problems with his magic. Though the apprentice thinks he has everyone's best interest at heart, he doesn't have the experience to know which problems are best solved by the people involved and which ones can be helped with. Most problems fit under the first category, but most apprentices try to help anyway.

It's not a measure of the student's stupidity that he wants to help others, not by a long shot. It's simply a function of his inexperience that he thinks he can do so. This temptation is more than just common — it's universal. Most teachers understand that their students are going to get into trouble with this, and they don't interfere. Some lessons are better learned through experience than through rote instruction. Besides, many apprentices will get themselves into worse trouble if their teachers try to keep them from helping someone. The basic nature of a mage is such that he will fight desperately for something he believes in — anything in his way, including his mentor, must be conquered, destroyed or just gotten around. Teachers often believe that it's better to just let an apprentice make his mistakes without getting in the way and creating even more nastiness.

Selfishness

It's just as easy, if not easier, for an apprentice to use his magic for self-gratifying ends as it is for him to use it to help others. It doesn't seem so bad to use his talent to keep an eye out for cops or other people who would stop him and his friends from roasting a bowl or two, and it doesn't seem so bad to hit just the right spot on that asshole's neck to send him flying. It certainly doesn't seem so bad to know where the roulette wheel will probably stop and to place bets accordingly.

But what happens when the stakes are raised? Once the apprentice is in the habit of using magic for his own ends, it's unlikely that he'll lose the habit without some life-changing event. It's a classic example of the slippery slope argument — once an apprentice takes the first steps down a steep, slick hill, what's to stop him from sliding all the way to the bottom? With magic, the bottom of the slippery slope can be horrendous: using magic to kill people he doesn't like, rearranging reality to suit his whim, altering others' lives for his own entertainment, etc. Paradox is one safeguard against sliding all the way down, but clever mages can avoid Paradox. Mages who have been working for their own ends since the very beginning of their apprenticeships usually turn into clever mages.

It is extremely difficult for an apprentice to avoid this particular pitfall, because doing so involves a mage's personal and group-related ethics. Anything can be considered selfish or wrong if presented in the proper light, and it's up to the mage and his own

conscience to decide where the line is drawn between acceptable self-interest and destructive selfishness.

Deciding what constitutes a step onto the slippery slope is a long and painful process. It's possible that once the apprentice has decided what makes up a wrong action, he's already five steps down the slope. The best way to avoid this temptation is careful inspection of the motive behind and the consequences of any magical action — a sticky proposition for a beginning mage not used to such consideration.

Selling Out

This is perhaps the second most dangerous temptation for a mage. It's also the most classic, described in the Bible, ancient fables and any number of morality plays. There are evil entities in the universe who are all too willing to offer an apprentice greater power or knowledge in exchange for some unspecified favor to be defined at a later time. It doesn't always start with the apprentice selling his soul, either, and the tempter isn't always a demon or a serpent. The tempter can be as mundane as a drug dealer asking the mage to look out for cops on his block in exchange for refusing to sell to kids. Every time the apprentice makes a deal like this, he loses some of his independence, some of his control over his life and his fate.

Unfortunately, the deals don't stay small for long. Eventually the dealer might ask the apprentice to spy on his competition, or the dealer might give the apprentice's name to a friend who needs a favor... the scale gets very large very fast. Once the student has given away his power, as it were, he will have an incredibly hard time getting it back.

On the other hand, this is a fairly familiar temptation to most people, simply because it is classic. Masters are usually careful to warn their students about situations that could lead them into such danger, and students have a good chance of recognizing a sellout when it's presented to them. However, tempters have adapted to this as well, developing sneakier and subtler deals. *Caveat alumnus.*

Recklessness

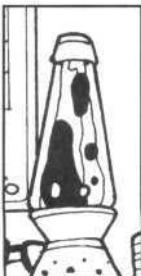
Compared to an apprentice selling his soul or loosing demons upon the world, just being careless with effects seems like a minor offense in the mage's hierarchy of sins. Paradox aside, things that seem small or insignificant can have unexpected consequences. Mages must, ideally, think their actions through carefully, weighing the possibilities and the potential outcomes before taking action. Note that this is an ideal situation, though — when an apprentice is staring down the barrel of a 9mm, there's not always time to think. Also, there's no good way for an apprentice-level mage to know exactly what could happen if he does something. Still, the idea is that mages need to be aware of what they're up to.

This is another situation that masters tend to stay out of. Apprentices aren't always going to believe their teachers when they're told what is likely to come of an action, and experience is the best instructor as far as consequences are concerned. Some apprentices are naturally cautious and don't need much guidance in this area, but most are at some point going to inadvertently screw something up royally.





Chapter Four: Resolution



"You get what everyone gets, you get a lifetime."

— Death from *Sandman*, by Neil Gaiman
"Ian? Tell me again about your eye."

The blond girl shifted her head in her teacher's lap so she could look at his face. His eyes were a startling blue, compelling just by themselves, but one had a dark fleck in the iris. It seemed to make his face more human, more real for the flaw. He looked away from the TV and gave a short laugh.

"I told you this already. When I was three, a babysitter dropped me down a flight of stairs. It bruised my kidney and ruptured my spleen."

"Yeah, you told me that, but I didn't know anything happened to your eye because of it. Did you hurt it when you fell?" She sat up and turned to face him.

"No. When your body gets traumatized, it creates flecks in your eyes. Most of them are too small to see, I think, and your eyes are dark anyway, so you wouldn't see them. Actually," he said, stretching his legs out, "it's kind of weird."

"There was this guy who trained birds. Once he had an owl, and he was trying to teach it to do something, and it panicked. It grabbed onto his arm with its talons, and it wouldn't let go, no matter what he did. Of course, he was getting his arm torn up, and he had to do something, so he took the owl's leg and broke it. Right there, on his arm. He really didn't have a choice — it was either break the bird's leg or lose his arm. So he did, and the bird freaked. The guy sat there and watched while a huge dark spot bloomed in the owl's eye. It never went away, either... the bird had these huge golden eyes and a permanent fleck in one of them."

"So the guy did some more research, and he discovered that it happened to people, too. So that's how I got the fleck in my eye." Ian shrugged and leaned back against the couch, flipping his hair out of the collar of his t-shirt and settling comfortably.

The girl copied his movements, rearranging herself to sit next to him on the floor. "I guess I was expecting it would be some magic thing, you know? Like you went through some kind of test or something and you came out all marked. Or that you got it when you Awakened or something." She shrugged and slid her bra strap back onto her shoulder, under her shirt.

Laughing, he put his arm around her. "Silly girl. I mean, not everything has to do with magic. You can fall off a bike or whatever, and get a scar, and it has nothing to do with the fact that you can do magic. And most of what happens with magic doesn't leave a scar you can see. Like this — tell me how you Awakened again."

"You know that story — I told you, like, first thing. Some kids outside an ice cream shop one night had caught a squirrel and hung it up from the roof outside with some wire. It was, like, crucified..." The girl's eyes darkened as she stared into space, remembering. "They had poked its eyes out, and there was runny stuff all down its little cheeks, and its mouth was hanging open. Its little tail, though, was what did it — it was all fluffy and perfect and just hanging there, and I was so horrified and pissed. I just suddenly looked at these kids and I was so pissed that I could see their minds, and I knew that they were twisted and sick, and I knew why... but yeah, I guess that was the first time I used Mind magic."

Ian tightened his arm around her shoulder briefly. He knew the story. "Right. And there wasn't anything to show that you had changed

that anyone could see. That's how it is with magic. It usually doesn't leave tracks. And when it does, they're pretty bizarre... like, much more bizarre than a fleck in my eye." He glanced at his student, the movie forgotten. "No, the main thing that taught me was that people will drop you. Probably more important than Awakening, sometimes.

Death (and the Working Apprentice)

I personally find Mr. Greyson to be revolting and without taste. Still, I cannot help but think that as morbid as he may be, he does have some words of wisdom to impart. What follows has seen print and airtime on various pirate-radio broadcasts. He's become somewhat of a small celebrity, with his own little gothic following. If the man had any real talent, he could go far. As it is, he only has a few trite words to impart. Take them for what they are worth. Despite his mannerisms, they may actually save your life.

David Greyson's Guide on How to Die

Death by Mundane

This is usually overlooked as a way for mages to die. Okay, so more experienced mages can usually avoid this. Younger ones, though, are still susceptible. There are lots of ways to bite the bullet in mundane ways. Death isn't always the beautiful black dove of wonder and enigmas, you know.

Guns will usually kill you pretty final. After all, we are talking about something that was designed to deliver the maximum amount of damage with the minimum of effort. They can kill you quick, and it actually takes the gunman more effort NOT to kill you. The bigger the gun, the easier it is to die. Multiple bullets will pretty much spell the end of you. Best thing to do if you want to get shot is to not take cover.

Knives aren't quite as bad, but they can get you too. It usually takes either you being real dumb or your attacker being real good for you to die. It can happen, though. Just remember that knives only have a limited reach, so if you want to die, make sure you're plenty within reach. Swords fit into this category, but they aren't used as much. Same rules as with knives, but more reach. They also usually kill faster than knives, that is to say, you don't have to get hit as many times.

Then there are blunt weapons. Baseball bats, clubs, maybe even the mace if your attacker is feeling anachronistic today. These are always good if you want to get your skull bashed or your chest cavity caved in. They are especially good if you like painful and slow deaths. Standing in the way of them is a good way to make sure you get clubbed. Remember, though, that some of them have a limited reach, so you might have to watch where you stand when you're attacked.

Next there is poisoning. Easiest way to make sure you get poisoned is to not watch what you're doing, or what is around you. Unlocked doors give assailants easy ways to get in and poison you. Some weapons will come with poison. I personally favor metal-nitrate bullets myself—nothing like nitrate poisoning to do you in! Mercury is generally overlooked, but is really good if you want to go crazy on your way to dying. Cyanide is quick, but arsenic can be stretched out. If you don't want your death to look like a poisoning, you can always try getting nicotine poisoning.

Oh, and before you think to ask, yes, he is just the same in person. It is for the fact that he is straightforward and honest that I find any redeeming value in him at all, and consider him to be a friend.

Death is, for the most part, pretty much the final state for everyone. Yeah, I've heard the stories. Father O'Malley loves talking about how we all have souls that will go on after us. Fine. And I think I've heard enough of you "High Mages" point out that we all have "Higher Selves" that will carry on when we're gone. That's all fine and good. Hey, I can like that somewhat. It's nice to see my life won't be completely wasted.

But I'm not talking the metaphysicals here, folks. I'm talking in the here and the now. In THIS lifetime, death is pretty much the final state. It's your last act. It's the one thing you can't take back, so if you're going to do it, make it right. You don't get to yell "Cut!" and you don't get to reshoot the last scene. Make it count.

That said, I give you

Disease is another way. Getting infected with some newly created virus can be very interesting. Still, you don't need modern science to die. There are lots of fatal diseases waiting for you out there; all you have to do is find them and catch them. If you're lucky, you can even pass them to coven mates before you die. Then they can share in the fun too.

Despite his snide remarks, David raises valid points. Most neophyte mages, so caught up in their new powers, overlook the mundane and everyday means of death. Since magicians are, by nature, drawn into conflict and strangeness, the budding apprentice is likely to run afoul of gunplay or weapons at some point. The best defense is to remain aware. Apprentices spend much of their early magical training developing their mystic senses. If the initiate knows that danger is near, it's usually a simple matter just to get out of the way!

For most mundane threats, knowing that the problem is coming is good enough. Pay attention to stay alive.

Death by Magic

Then there's always magic. Nothing like dying at school, boys and girls. If you're really careless with your lessons, you can do yourself in by losing control. That's also good if you want to take people with you. Magic is really good for fireworks, and if it's heinous enough, you might even get reality taking a whack at you.

You can also piss off a powerful mage and die. That's usually easy, especially if you're a young mage. Now, you have to be careful, though. If you have a good mentor, he's probably got a lot of things pretty well warded. They don't usually ward you, though, because then it would make it difficult to use your own magics. So, if you piss off the mage and want to die, being away from the chantry will give him lots of opportunity. Or, you could annoy a mage in your chantry so that he attacks you within the confines of the ward. That's always a good one. Hey, and if he manages to be your mentor, then that's a plus, because he'll know exactly what to do to kill you.

If you have managed to incite your mentor enough to provoke him into attacking you, then you have already effectively failed your apprenticeship.

Magical disasters are not the most common demise for apprentices; most initiates do not have the magical clout to summon up a truly dangerous

manifestation. However, quite a few meet their ends by toying with talismans or established spells beyond their understanding. When a mentor says "Don't touch," pay attention.

Death by Accident

There are also lots of dumb little ways to die. Trying to work a spell while driving can be a sure way of getting into a wreck. You also have the chance of taking sleepers with you too. Now THAT's what I call Ascension! Being careless with electricity or foci is a good way to die—overusing drugs as a focus is an easy way to do that. And nothing feels like an OD, let me tell you. If I could pick my way to go...

I'll include the reality kicks here too. Nothing like fucking up a spell and literally having the world come down on you. That is a way to go in glory. Talk about fireworks there. Oh boy, is that ever a show to watch!



This little bit I stumbled across completely by accident. It was written a few years ago by what I would guess to be a Verbena who lost his mind. It is a very interesting look at what magic can do to you, especially when you begin to let it take control of you. There are definite lessons to be learned, so pay close attention.

The Meaning of Life When You Have Life

I used to be a medical student. That was a long time ago. That was back before I even dreamed that there was such a thing as magic. I was a student, way too busy with my work, and not really happy with it, but content to work way too hard and become a physician being paid way too much. It was a simple life, but what did I know? I was asleep.

When I woke up, I saw how pointless my studies were. I decided to turn instead to holistic medicine, and made that my livelihood, taking the lessons of my mentor and using them to help in healing my patients. It was all good. As my Arts progressed, so did my treatments. I became well known as a doctor, and could give my patients "miracle cures" to fatal diseases. I was happy. I was doing what I loved, and it gave my life meaning.

In true form, I never stopped learning. I kept learning, kept growing in my Art. As I grew, I could do more for people. I could help more people; I could do more things. I loved it. It was wonderful. It was grand.

As I grew, I began maturing. I found that I could put aside simple foci and do my Art directly. Unfortunately, my patients didn't always understand what I was doing. It made my healings more difficult to perform. I found myself losing patients, sometimes chasing them away. The better I became in my Art, the harder it was to continue my profession. I began to lose sight of what it was I had set out to do.

Also remember that animals attacking you works, especially if you can get rabid animals in the wild. And there are so many ways to scare animals into attacking you! Actually, the less you know about an area you're in, the easier it is to get attacked, be it from animals in the wild, or gangs on the streets. Muggers and other attackers are always attracted by naivete. The less you know, the more likely it is you'll get their attention.

Again, this returns to the important point that the sensory magics common to apprentices are perhaps the most useful survival tools. An apprentice cannot afford to antagonize anyone or to be caught unaware. Don't wander around alone, don't get lost and don't provoke attackers — this is good advice for anyone. Since an apprentice can be prey to much more than just mundane threats, though, it is doubly true for an initiate mage.

Well, I hope that this helped you on your quest to die. Remember, knowledge is power, so the less you know, the more power they have to kill you.

The Grips of Insanity

I began withdrawing. After a while, magic was all I had. I withdrew further and further, until magic was all I knew.

So, now as I sit here, and my room slowly goes white around me, and the world slowly fades away from me, I write this, hoping that you will hear me. Hoping that you will understand. Hoping that you will not lose sight of the most important thing of all.

Going Marauder

What does it mean to go Marauder? Is this a sect that you join? Who do you talk to? Where are the chantries? What is the initiation?

There isn't one. No sect, no initiation, no one to talk to. We are not talking about a group, though we like to lump Marauders together. The truth is, they are not together. That is why they are so dangerous, and why they are sometimes hunted down. It isn't a sect that you join; it is a state of mind. It is something that mages can become. Call it Marauder; call it insane, call it rogue if you want. It's all the same. It is very dangerous, and not something that is suggested as a goal for you.

I've met a lot of mages who get it in their minds that Marauders have ultimate power. They do not. I heard a Hermetic explain the state of the Marauder as being when the Avatar of the mage takes complete control, locking the mage into a state of consciousness that is called Quiet. He explained this to me as we looked at the shell of a mage with great potential who actively sought Marauder Quiet. The apprentice sought the ultimate release of his Avatar. What he received was a permanent state of Quiet that anyone has yet to cure him of, and that has taken at least three other mages into Quiet with him.

There are two times that an Apprentice is likely to risk losing control completely and becoming a Marauder. Chances are, if you're reading this, that you've managed to avoid the first.

I'll tell you about it anyway. Those of you in the big Chantries can use the knowledge to help keep those Awakening out of it.

Often, when a mage Awakens, it is very traumatic. Sometimes the mage can't handle this. Maybe his powers manifest in ways beyond anything he can control. Maybe he just cannot



understand or fathom what is occurring. Whatever the case, it puts too much stress on the mind of the newly Awakening mage, and he retreats immediately into a Quiet. At that point, it's showtime, and you have a newly Awakened Marauder. I met one once who was rather clever (or I should say the rest of us were rather stupid?). We did not realize until well after his training was underway and he'd been graduated to Disciple that there was a problem. By then, you couldn't help but notice. An apprentice can only do so many vulgar effects. A Disciple, however...

The second time that an apprentice is at risk is in training. Let's face it, your training is not easy. Already you've felt the pressure and stress. Chances are, your mentor is pushing you to do more than you feel you can, faster than you feel you can. We have to. We need you to be stronger, and we need you to be so yesterday. We have to push you because this world will not be kind to you. Face it, reality has her favorites, and we do not rank among them.

So, what happens to drive the apprentice insane? I've seen many cases. Some have been averted, but a few have not. It is a sad thing, but it happens.

One thing that can cause the Apprentice to lose it is simply burnout. You do too much too quickly, and you lose sight of what is important, what is real, and what you set out to do in the first place. We see the effects of burnout all the time among Sleepers. People handle it in different ways. Some become apathetic. Some change jobs. Some withdraw completely.

Now, imagine someone in that third group as a mage. That third group member usually becomes a Marauder. The stress builds and builds until one day the apprentice snaps, and that is

all she wrote. She just withdraws into her own little world. Fortunately, these are the easiest to pull out before the damage is done. A wise mentor can also spot the problem before the apprentice slips into Quiet.

Another common problem is philosophical conflict — an apprentice who is schooled in a paradigm that flies at odds with what she's learned before. With care, this can be worked out, but sometimes, we simply try to gloss over it, hoping that the apprentice will absorb it. Well, the truth of the matter is, apprentices don't always get over it. As with the burnout, they withdraw, and you have a new Marauder on your hands. Also as with the burnout, it can be easy to spot if the mentor is vigilant.

Stress is another factor in Marauders. Like burnout, it's caused by the apprentice being forced to learn too much too quickly. Unlike burnout, though, the mage doesn't always show outward signs that there is a problem — well, not signs that can be recognized. We all know what stress is like. In the case where stress gets the better of the apprentice, though, the snap is usually sudden and unexpected. Because of this, it can also be near impossible to save the mage before he reaches the point of becoming a Marauder.

Okay, so that is how you can lose your mind. How do you not lose your mind? Talk to your mentor about what is going on. If you're getting burned out, let him know. If he gives you any talk about how important it is to push on, tell him what I've told you. Make him understand. Talk to friends as well. Get help if you feel you're in over your head. Don't be afraid to depend on your friends. That is what they are for. If you're having conflicts, then

talk them out with your mentor. Get him to understand how you feel. You'd be surprised how easy it is to work things out.

Storytelling the Madness

Having a character go Marauder is the surest way for that character to lose playability. Most Storytellers will not let players play Marauders because they are unpredictable. While as an NPC, they can add flavor to a chronicle; as players, they can completely change the course of a chronicle. Storytellers also have a harder time using the Reality Slapdown to keep them in check. Marauders have Paradox rain down all around them, but they usually come out of it dry as a bone.

Okay, so it is not recommended that you let a player play a Marauder, unless, of course, you've planned out your game that way. Yet, if they want a character, that slowly spirals out of their hands and into yours, or if you feel that the character's actions are leading him down that road, then please, have fun.

This book is not talking about running a chronicle where Marauders are characters. We would suggest studying the Book of Madness. Just be warned ahead of time, though, Marauders are not meant for simple play. Of course, the Golden Rule says...but don't say you weren't warned in every supplement.

Now, if you want to drive a character mad, there are some things that you as the Storyteller will want to keep in mind.

The first is what exactly the state of the Marauder is. The Marauder is in a permanent state of Quiet (permanent meaning that once he becomes a Marauder, there is no turning back), where he sees the world according to the paradigm that he wishes to see exist. His Avatar pretty much controls him at this point, and he acts completely on its whims. This is why Marauders are so hard to predict. Avatars do not act as people do. They follow drives that we can only guess at. (For more, see the Avatars in Chapter Two).

So, in game and story terms, how is this state reached? In a regular mage game, it usually happens when a mage acquires too

much Paradox. He goes into Quiet, only this time, no one can get him out. Storywise, the mage has been fighting reality, insisting that it works as he says it does. It reaches a point where he drives himself insane, and he becomes locked into his own reality.

In an apprentice game, though, matters are going to be a little different. Paradox probably will not flow so freely because most rotes are going to be coincidental. That doesn't mean it won't happen, but it won't happen as often. Getting there storywise is easy. The apprentice either gets burned out or stressed out, or his conflicting philosophies drive him to withdraw. He gets in his mind this idea of how he wants the world to work, and as a result, becomes locked into a state of Quiet where that is all he sees, what he wants to see.

The trick is, you might see that the mage is headed this way, but without doing the vulgar magic to acquire the Paradox. That's all right. What is Paradox, but a manifestation of how the mage is unlike reality? The Resonance of living a magical life - especially the apprentice lifestyle, where the mage eats, drinks and sleeps magical practice — slowly builds up magical energies and stresses. New concept? Perhaps, but in some cases it makes sense, especially in the case of the mage who is suffering from conflicting philosophies. For other cases, such as burnout or stress, it is similar. The mage is unable to cope in the world around him, and it is slowly leaving its mark in the form of Paradox.

Another idea is to remember that Paradox is not the only thing that brings on Quiet. If the character experiences great trauma, the Storyteller may feel it is in and of itself enough to drive the mage into quiet. Also, the apprentice going on a Seeking may find himself drawn into a Quiet if the Seeking fails (which is a big possibility in the cases of an initiate overburdened with stress, conflict and burnout).

Once the character enters quiet, he can be brought out before he hits the point of becoming a Marauder. The sorts of stresses that can lead to Quiet are detailed in Chapter Three — namely, everyday life and magical study combined. For more on Marauders, see Book of Madness.

Corruption



There are many potential pitfalls to the apprentice. Falling to corruption — be it vice, spiritual death or the Cauls of the Nephandi — is, perhaps, the most lamented loss. A corrupted mage turns his potential into a wasted lot, his gift into nothing more than a shadow of former greatness. Corrupted, the mage becomes nothing more than a symbol of Ascension lost, the quest failed and humanity at its worst.

Getting Lost in the Material

The quest of a mage is a quest for spirituality, enlightenment and the Grail of understanding. The tools of that quest, though, often take material form. Without proper tools, most mages have difficulty performing magic. Some tools are useful in expanding consciousness, exploring altered states or delving into unknown or frightening

thoughts. Without proper care and guidance, these tools instead become chains, trapping the apprentice in a material prison.

Though Cultists of Ecstasy are most widely known for their problems with physical addictions and vices, no mage is immune to such blandishments. The power to alter minds and see hidden features can lead to great wealth and prestige in Sleeper society. The mage who seeks such ends grows no further, lost in a welter of possession and *things* that do not contribute to Ascension. It's sad but true: Culture conditions people to value things above spiritual development. That conditioning is hard to break, and no matter how talented the mage, that mindset leads to stagnation.

Other mages lose themselves in mind-altering substances that are used in their Traditional rituals. Though Cultists decry drug dependency, it does happen. The apprentice needs to remember, again, that the tools are just doorways to understanding, not the sole bestower of enlightenment. If an apprentice is overly dependent on a tool, get rid of it. Remove the drugs, the weapons, whatever — make the novice start anew, finding the power to channel magic through a different means.

Nephandi

Notes from Sir Lawrence

This lovely little bit is probably from Mark Gillain — it's difficult to make out the exact voices on the original tape, but it certainly seems to follow his predilections.

Do you even have a fucking clue? I could tell you that these people would kill your sister, then eat her corpse, and you'd dismiss it as histrionic. And you know what? I'd be underplaying it.

If I run into a Nephandus, I run away. If I even think that there's one nearby, I clear out, and then I tell my buddies. I am not big on dying, or eternal soul torture, or emotional games, or becoming someone's pawn in a sick parody of a cosmic joke played out on the entire human race.

I'd shoot the damn bastards in the back, if I could trust a gun to work on them.

Mark's rather exacerbated description does the Nephandi justice, if anything can be considered "justice" in reference to them. Apprentices must stay on guard for the servitors of Oblivion. Many Tradition mentors take exactly the wrong attitude with the Nephandi, insulating the apprentice in hopes that the neophyte will never hear of or meet one. This approach is disastrous; any mage who survives long enough *will* encounter the Twisted Ones, and *will* be forced to rely on every bit of knowledge and cunning to survive relatively intact. As with all things magical, an under-prepared apprentice is a mage at grave risk.

The Nephandi of Earth are most often lesser servitors of some greater power. As such, they weave elegant webs of decep-

tion and influence to spread their power base. A Nephandus is generally quick to offer one of two things to an apprentice: immediate power or immediate understanding. The slow progress of the magical arts, or the sometimes-stingy training of their masters frustrates many apprentices. A Nephandus can wave away such concerns with a simple pact. Other apprentices are confused or bewildered by their suddenly changed world. Nephandi are more than eager to fill their heads with all manner of terrifying tales calculated to drive the mage into service to darkness.

Nephandi are just as quick to pick up newly Awakened mages as any other group. Unfortunately, if a prospective apprentice runs afoul of a Nephandus just after Awakening, there's not much to be done. Unless a studious mentor has already drilled the apprentice in magical theory, he may not even be aware of the threat. An apprentice without control of his powers is lost to the Nephandus, and there is nothing to be done but to add him to the rolls of enemies.

On the other hand, a smart and well-trained apprentice may notice the approach of a Nephandus. Since most Nephandi are adept at masking their spiritual deterioration, it takes a bit of insight and communication to figure out that the mage is tainted. Rarely, the Nephandus is up-front about his goals, but usually they are craftier than that. Best bet: Get the mentor, who in should contact his allies and hunt the Nephandus down. There's no other way to be sure. If the poor apprentice is stuck on his own, his best hope is to flee. All though the Nephandi do not pursue the same enlightenment as other mages, their Infernal powers are more than a match for an untrained initiate.





The Downward Spiral

In most cases in a Mage chronicle, corruption means going through the Cauls as Barabbi and joining the ranks of the Nephandi. We suggested that players *don't* play Nephandi. They are not dark shepherds of men. They are not dark aspects of dreams. They are not even the poor souls dragged screaming to Oblivion — they only to rise to serve it. Close to that, you say? Yes, close, but still a world away. Nephandi deliberately choose the downward path and bind themselves to the service of things that pervert their enlightenment. They strive against anything that mankind can comprehend. In short, they're the baddest of the bad, and this book isn't going to tell you how to make a character who falls to the Dark Masters.

The corrupted mage becomes fully aware at some point of what is going on. They realize what has happened and make the choice to follow still. When brought to the Cauls, they are not tricked nor deceived. They are not kidnapped nor dragged screaming. They go of their own free will. They are warned that they must complete it of their own free will, and they do so. They willingly have their Avatar ripped inside out and twisted. They do it to themselves, for the sake of serving something they understand to be the state of pure primal evil.

When you run a scene involving Nephandi, you should want to go and take a hot shower in Lysol. It should leave you feeling like you touched something dark and make you want to get rid of the feeling. It should have a similar effect on players. When they understand that this is a Nephandus that they have been dealing with, it should give them

pause. It should make them realize that what happened was just really bad, and maybe that five-minute smoke break isn't such a bad idea. Remember, this game is still about horror, and if done right, there is nothing more frightening than a Nephandus.

We've spent a lot of time talking about Nephandi, but this is not the only corruption that a mage will face. Evil can also take the form of the twisted, mad, or just plain bad Tradition mage who wants to make sure everyone else joins him or dies, and sometimes both. Like the Nephandus, he will use every trick in the book, sometimes being subtle or blatant. Unlike the Nephandus, he does not care if the characters follow willingly or not. They just have to follow.

Going Marauder can easily be construed as corruption. So too can the Tradition mage taken into the Technocracy, or vice versa. Corruption is when something meant for one thing is taken for use of another, therefore twisted and corrupted. Possession is a good example. Corruption has no meaning without context — a mage is corrupted when his ideals and motives are altered into something other than what they should be.

However the corruption, whatever it be, whomever is doing it, for whatever purpose, the corruption story should have one purpose: In an apprentice game, corruption is the cold water in the shower. It's the loud alarm in the sweet dream. It should be the ultimate wake-up call. No matter how the mood comes across to players, they should realize that this is a dark world, that they are not immune to the corruptive elements, and that no matter how many dice they have to roll on that perception check, they will not always see it coming.

Boogeymen

Excerpted from Surviving in the *Urban Wild: A Talent's Guide*, by Robert J. Scarola, orphan and known paramilitary operative.

A Cautionary Note

Though Scarola is extremely inflammatory and prone to paranoia, he does have several points that could be useful to beginning mages. He may exaggerate the threat of being subjugated by Tradition mages, but his description of more mundane threats and of the Mad Ones is worth reading. It is always wise to know what lies in wait out in the wide world, and Scarola has identified the most common threats that will face an initiate. The wise initiate will realize that the level of literacy and the militaristic bent of this pamphlet ought not get in the way of its valuable information. To quote a popular song, just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not after you. A healthy dose of paranoia can save an initiate's life.

The world is not a nice place. Though young talents might be powerful when they grow up, they're tempting little snacks for a wide variety of things that lurk around the edges of their worlds. Even full-fledged talents are tasty snacks, but they're a little harder to get a hold of, so hunters are more apt to aim for the young ones. In order to help initiates get through their weak stage, this section of my guide attempts to display some of the predators that stalk them.

This guide is not designed to induce paranoia. It's only supposed to open your eyes to the reality of life as a talent. If you know what's out to get you, you can defend more effectively, arm yourself appropriately and even strike first. I'll deal with weapons, defense systems, suppliers and attack strategies later, but first you need to know who your *enemy* is!

There are two basic sorts of predators out there. One is the human kind. These hunters want to make you *slaves* to their desires, *kill* the talent inside you or *subvert* you to their mindset. You have to be on guard *at all times* or you risk being caught (either physically or mentally) and enslaved.

The other kind of predator is the inhuman kind. That's the best way to describe them, because they can take all kinds of forms. Everything from monsters to demons to sentient viruses is running around out there, just planning *how to get you!* The trick to the inhuman things is that sometimes they can look just like humans, so you have to be careful that what you think is your best friend or your teacher really is. I'll lay out some of the things that will let you know that your friends or family have been converted by *inhuman predators*.

Human Threats

The first threat you need to be looking out for is the man who wants you for his *slave*. He'll ask you to help him with little things at first, then bigger and bigger things, until you're working only for him. He might even tell you that you're helping a bigger cause, but don't be fooled — you're doing his bidding! The subtle ones are the most dangerous, because most initiates don't know enough to see through their sneaky plots and realize that they're being *used as a pawn*.

The way to avoid these people is to gather every piece of information available to you, through libraries, phone records and friends. Find out who associates with anyone asking you for a favor, and find out what they do and what they stand for. If you discover *anything suspicious*, look for anything more to confirm your suspicion. If you find that, then the man asking you to do

something for him is only looking for a pawn or a slave, and *you must not be that*. If you don't find anything to make you think that the man has any ulterior motive, and you think that the goal is something worthwhile of your time as a talent, go ahead and help, but *don't jump in blind!*

Some slavemasters don't bother with the subtle tricks. They just capture you and force you to do things for them by threatening to kill you or your family or friends. The good thing about these people is that there aren't very many of them, and they don't take any work to detect. Once they've got you, you know who they are and you have every right to *defend yourself in any way you can*. Like I said, though, there aren't many of them, so you don't have to be as watchful for them as for the sneakier types, but never let your guard down, or they might think you're weak and try to take you!

Another kind of human predator is the kind that thinks your given talent is evil or wrong. This person thinks that your gift can be *brainwashed* out of you and he will try. This man is dangerous because he believes he's right! He truly thinks he has the power of God and right and that makes him determined and stubborn, even though he's completely misled and fooled.

Young talents, between the ages of 5 and 18, are the easiest for this predator to get, because their minds aren't strong yet and they can be warped. Also, young talents' parents don't understand what it is to be talented, so they are *wittingly seduced* by the brainwashers' words. The best way to defend against this enemy is to camouflage yourself — don't look like anything they would want to bother with! Act like a regular person, do whatever you have to blend in. (Advanced camouflage techniques are discussed in Part XIII, Camouflage.) If you do get captured, pretend to go along with it — tell the so-called doctors that you took some bad drugs, or tell them that you were practicing for a movie, anything that will get you free. This is how you fight them, in your mind. Fight to keep your talent, and stay strong. The only ones who fall are the weak, and you as a talent *are not weak!* Get out as soon as possible, and remember who took you so you can launch an effective countermove.

The most dangerous of human threats are other talents. Their conviction in their own concepts of how the world works is as strong as yours, but they think they need to convert you to their mindset. They think that it's not only for your own good but for the good of *all humanity* to make you believe them. Usually they'll stick to persuasion and debate, but other times they'll actually try to take you by force.

Just like with mortal brainwashers, your best bet to avoid this kind of threat is to not get noticed in the first place. But if you do get singled out for some re-education attempts, you have two choices. First, you can let it roll off you and leave. This is effective, but only if you're sure you can escape. Some people, on the other hand, are specifically willing to get in there and argue for their own viewpoints — if you're one of those, showing anyone who might want to convert you that you're too strong and that you won't be swayed is the right thing! Let them talk to you, let them try to convince you, then get in there and find all the holes in their arguments! Engage them in discussion, debate an all-out war! Stand up for what you believe and you will be seen as strong.

The only danger to this kind of approach is that you are, after all, dealing with talents. They can do all the things you can and then some. You always have to be alert for this everyday danger to mutate into a supernatural threat.

More Than Human Threats

You can never be sure whether you're dealing with just a garden variety psycho or something much, much worse: a stark raving loony talent. The crazy talents are supremely dangerous because you don't know what kinds of abilities they have and you don't know what they're going to do. Being able to identify psycho talents is *extremely important!*

One kind of talent who's lost it entirely is the kind who have sold out to something bigger than any human. They're hungry for power, and it's the sad truth that there are things out there that have it and are willing to give it to people in exchange for some unspecified price. You don't want to be that price! More than that, you don't want to be the next *target for recruitment*, because they recruit harder than Jesus freaks and the army put together! There's also no discharge from this kind of service —you're stuck *forever*.

So how do you recognize this danger? You look for the person who's trying too hard to help you and never really asks for anything specific in return. You look for the person with a sinister gleam in his eye when he asks you if you want anything. You look for the talent who comes up with dark solutions to every problem and power you can't account for. You look for the talent who always tries to get you to meet his master — the real talent has no master, just teachers! And once you figure out that there's something suspicious about one certain talent, you do everything you can to find out more. If you find anything that

might be Satanic-looking or seems evil to you, find someone you trust who is more skilled than you in his abilities. Tell him, and get rid of this danger! But don't try it alone —that's a suicide mission, and you're likely to get fed to the sellout's master.

The other thing to be watching out for is for the talent's master to come to you directly. Never believe anyone who says he can give you knowledge. Never believe anyone who says he can teach you more than anyone else in less time. It always takes work to learn, and you always have to make an effort. Anyone who tells you different is lying and wants something *from you*. If you do get approached like this, refuse the offer. Find yourself someone you trust, and do the same thing you would to get rid of the talent who's already sold out. Never sell out! Never give yourself away because then you become a *slave!*

The other kind of dangerous talent is the kind that has truly lost all contact with reality. This kind is even more unpredictable than the sellout, and he's more dangerous besides. The sellout doesn't think the rules of morality and strength apply, to him, but the loony doesn't think any rules apply to him at all. Not only does he mock all of reality's laws, he mocks the idea that there should be laws in the first place. This kind of danger will try to seduce you by telling you that he's free, that you're the slave of your own mind, but don't be fooled! He's not free —he's insane. He's trapped in his own fallacies and complete misconceptions!

It would be easy for a weak-willed talent to believe a loony because they are sneaky in their persuasions. They wiggle their way into your brain and plant their insidious ideas, and sometimes they might even use their abilities to encourage the ideas to grow and stay on your mind for days and days, until you decide to do something about it. They can seem just as reasonable as any normal person sometimes, which makes them *even more dangerous*. The only real clue you have to the fact that they're detached from reality even as we know it is their aversion to rules. Anyone who tries to tell you that you don't have to do certain things or act in certain ways is suspect! Don't let this kind of *weasel* get into your brain at all — be strong in your belief, and don't be swayed by anyone who tries to tell you that you can get away from it all.

In short, don't let anyone, talent or not, tell you how to think or live your life in any way! You are better than they are —you are stronger, smarter, and you are talented. The best talents are the ones who make their own way and do what they think is right. Stand on your own! Be strong, and you will survive.

Put Less Histrionically

Nephandi and Marauders are certainly threats to initiates, if only because the initiate has no real experience with them and doesn't know what to avoid. The Mad Ones and the Lost Ones realize this, and they capitalize on it. Corruption isn't the only thing they do well. They can just as readily turn an apprentice into a shell of his former self, an automated slave, as bend him to the will of madness or destruction.

The Nephandi and their demon masters are the greater of the two threats. These mages are always looking for recruits, and initiates are just fresh meat to them. Their primary targets are the initiates who are actively seeking power and knowledge and the initiates who are completely inexperienced in anything arcane.

The first type is targeted because she is likely to take a bargain for a given piece of knowledge. This initiate might not

know to be wary of a free lunch, as it were, and even if she does, the Nephandi and their masters have learned how to tempt beginners. They rarely start off by asking for something major in return for their services, if they ask for anything at all. Compared to Lost Ones and demons, drug dealers are less than petty amateurs at the game of freely giving a little taste away to get their clients hooked and coming back for more. This tactic keeps the initiate within her comfort zone — "it can't be that bad, can it, if they're just giving me something and not asking for anything?" tends to be a common rationalization.

The second type just doesn't know what a real mage is supposed to be like. She isn't likely to realize that her new teacher, who's providing her with a comfortable apartment, spending money, food and a PlayStation, has an agenda beyond helping a new apprentice. She might not even realize that he's really teaching her how to enslave Sleepers when he teaches her certain Mind

arts. If the "teacher" keeps his student away from other mages and from her friends and family — a textbook tactic for controlling someone — she is even less likely to figure out that something very dangerous is going on.

The Nephandus' greatest tool in subverting initiates is his guile. Like the classic portrayal of Satan as the Father of Lies and the Great Deceiver, the Nephandus is brilliant at getting people to believe what he wants them to believe, and he can exploit them to no end once he's conned them over to his side. This ought to be a terrifying thought — how is an initiate to know if she's being told the truth? How is she supposed to know if her teacher is really what he says he is if she never gets to meet any of the other members of the Tradition? It should be even more terrifying for orphans — they generally have less contact with other mages than Tradition initiates do, and they are considerably more vulnerable.

This thought pattern is familiar to the Nephandi as well. Paranoia can be an excellent weapon or tool — by creating distrust and unease among initiates and mages who are aware of the Nephandi's existence, the Lost Ones serve their own ends even if they never take a single apprentice. The fear of the boogeyman is part of what keeps it alive, after all.

Marauders aren't nearly the threat that the Nephandi are, simply because they're both less common and less inclined to recruit. Initiates have to worry less for their immortal souls and more for the safety of their everyday lives with Marauders. However, that's nothing to sniff at. The process of education is made considerably more difficult when every book the initiate tries to open spontaneously turns into *Pippi Longstocking*.

Enlightenment



You've made it this far. You've dodged other supernatural entities. You've picked up the lessons of your mentor or mentors. You've unearthed your own potential while avoiding depravity, insanity, death or stagnation. What next?

Congratulations — you graduate to becoming a real mage. Now you get to fight for true enlightenment.

First Contact

Transcribed from tapes made of conversations between Enrique "Rico" Macias, affiliated with the Cult of Ecstasy (see file MAC-114372), and Shannon Labour, unaffiliated. Conversations occurred over the time period 12 Feb 1999 to 6 March 1999. In all cases, assume the speaker is Macias. The operation was set only to monitor Macias and his two closest associates, so this portion of the transcription was originally overlooked as unimportant. I wish at this time to reopen the examination of this operation on the strength of these few interactions.

Labour evidences a talent for pyrokinesis, but she doesn't seem to have any further abilities. The danger she presents to herself is minimal to intermediate. She does not yet present great danger to others; without the proper guidance, however, she will put lives and property in jeopardy. To that end, I recommend she be recruited for the paranormal study and taught how best to control her talent. The study is also an appropriate vehicle to discourage her from developing further, more dangerous abilities.

I have been unable to determine whether Macias has spoken with anyone in our organization, but it is clear that he is encouraging reckless behavior and endangering not only himself and Labour but everyone in his general vicinity—

- S.A.C. Marcus J. Winter

2/13/99 15:14

Labour's residence

First, chuck your incense. Then get rid of the candles, the bells, the crystals and whatever other crap you've got lying around as "meditation aids." The only meditation aid there is, ever, is your pineal gland. Your brain, baby. If you have to have something else, use your body. Sit in a pretzel shape or do a million sit-ups or whatever, but sticking little rocks to your forehead just isn't going to do it.

Okay, now get up. Go out the door. Go to a market. Take the bus. Anything. Talk to people and live your life. That's what's out there, and that's the only thing that's ever going to bring you some vision of enlightenment or something like that. You met me, you know? So here's a lesson: People out there know stuff you don't, and you're not going to learn it by humming the universal *Inna Godda da Vida* backwards by yourself...

2/16/99 22:42

Macias' residence

Well, what did you expect? Asking some cashier at the Blue Unicorn if he knows any real witches or something is just going to get you nowhere. That's like a yuppie Magic Incorporated, Buy Your Good Karma 50% Off store! And did you see the look he gave you? He thinks he knows all the great secrets, like he's some bad-ass in the whole pagan magic thing, and he thinks you're just some kid. You've got to figure out for yourself who's the real deal first. Not like you have to interrogate them about the Mysteries of the Universe, but just kinda talk for a while. Like I told you. Relax and make some friends. Then kinda follow them into the scene, and listen to what people say, and watch how people get treated. That's how you really find stuff out...

2/24/99: 17

Telephone conversation

Jeeezus, Shan, it's dawn; what do you want? Okay, tell me. Yeah, the group sounds like a good thing. The leader's supposed to be a channeled entity, isn't she? I think I know who she is. She's supposed to be pretty good, too. She starts by having you ask permission to be her student, right? Yeah, okay, I know who you're talking about. Kind of floozy for my taste, but at least you found someone who's not going to brainwash you and get you to give them all your money. You found them pretty fast, though... wonder if they were looking for you or something. Whatever — it's cool you found someone to start with. See, I told you to go out.

2/28/99 13:52

Moxie Java, 17th Street

Hey, cool. So Saarilyn taught you that? Kinda neat. Have you done the formal asking to be a student thing yet? Here, light mine... have you tried lighting it without shutting your eyes and concentrating and all that? Yeah, of course you can. It gets easier with practice. But you have

to be sure to hold up your lighter when you do it. You don't want people to get all worked up if they see it, you know? So this is it, huh? No massive revelations or anything? I guess that'll come later. You could always come hang out with me and Zeke and Ben — we'd help you out... Nah, I'm kidding. Just giving you shit. But you can come hang out if you want.

3/3/9921:29

Macias' residence

I'm glad you came over, dude. We're holding, so you can light the bowl for us and we'll hang out and stuff. No, you don't have to smoke out if you're not into it — no pressure or anything. If you decide you want to, you can, though. It's pretty fun, and you get a really cool, wacked look at stuff. Some people have even learned stuff while they were stoned that they wouldn't have learned otherwise. Anyway, sit down, relax...

3/6/99 18:32

Macias' residence

Well, if you're sure you want to try, that's cool. Here. Use the lighter to start with; you don't have to use your little trick to do everything. Okay, now put your finger over the hole in the end of the pipe... yeah, like that. Now suck hard until the bud glows, and keep it like that for a little bit. Yeah. Now take your finger off and breathe in. Yeah, just like that. Now hand it over here.

3/6/99 18:59

Macias' residence

No, see, you can't just fight everything. Smoke, life, who you are, any of it. You totally have to just give in and let it wash through you, let it carry you. You're fighting, I can tell. Listen, just completely surrender. Yeah, lie back if you want. Think about something totally rhythmic and hypnotic. Like your heartbeat. Focus entirely on that, and don't worry about what's going to happen next. Relax and let it take as much time as it takes. Hours, days, whatever. No one's rushing you.

More Concretely

Enlightenment is virtually impossible to discuss in universal game terms. The only concrete measure of a mage's understanding dial can go on a character sheet is his Arete rating, and it's pretty clear that there's a lot more to a mage's progress than just a new dot on a sheet of paper. So achieving enlightenment, making the next step in the lab or mastering a new kata has to happen through roleplaying.

For an apprentice, the revelation that brings him to a new level of understanding can be pretty minor compared to the things more advanced mages do or achieve. If the Storyteller and the player feel that the character is exploring or learning something important enough to result in a breakthrough, the player can gain the appropriate dots even without the experience points. Likewise, if a player has accumulated enough experience points to raise his Arete but hasn't done any roleplaying, the Storyteller can disallow any Arete gain.

Enlightenment should, like all other parts of a character's magic, fit his paradigm. A Son of Ether initiate is going to have considerable trouble gaining insight from a series of katas, and a technology-minded Orphan whose fondest desire is to buzz around the city in a Quintessence-powered dunebuggy is probably going to fall asleep in a rowan grove. Storytellers should feel free to disallow Arete gain if the method doesn't fit the character.

On the other hand, though, young mages are the most likely to pick up eclectic paradigms. If a character is learning from a variety of teachers or other sources, it's perfectly reasonable to allow him to gain enlightenment more easily from disparate sources.

Orphans are becoming more and more common, so it's safe to assume that a beginning mage has a pretty good chance of running into them and picking up their habits.

Storytellers should also keep in mind that an apprentice needs opportunities to advance. Almost no one spends his entire life sweeping the chantry floor and never gets any further, and story lines should provide chances for the apprentice to prove — or discover — himself. Playing pawn to greater powers, for example, is a fine story element, but players will quickly get tired of their characters being expendable. Characters should have a chance to do something about their pawn status, learn some new tricks and earn some respect for themselves in the process.

Again, on the other hand, apprentices are just that - apprentices. They're still learning, and students have a tendency to get in over their heads when they think they know more than they do. This is another good way to lead an apprentice character into enlightenment: Let him get into trouble and then have him get out of it. Orphans in particular are susceptible to this scenario, but that doesn't mean that a young Hermetic isn't just as likely to get a little arrogant about his power.

Lessons aren't always fun, especially when they're life lessons. Likewise, enlightenment carries a price, even if it's only time spent practicing or studying.

Here's hoping that the price is worth the payoff.

Storytelling With Apprentices

So now you've got a group of low-powered characters. What do you, as a Storyteller, do with them? The usual romp after the evil, naughty Technocrats probably isn't going to be an option because initiates just don't have the skill or knowledge to take anything down, really. A fight against some Nephandi? Forget it

— the initiates will be lunchmeat. A low-down, dirty street chronicle? That's better, but it still presents a few problems.

Beginning characters don't have to be hamstrung by the low number of Arete and Sphere dots they have. As we frequently point out, the idea of the game is to go beyond the character's stats and get into the meat of her personality. Starting off with apprentice characters is a great way to build long-term characters that players will enjoy playing because they get to know the character so well — the idea of a player developing a personal relationship to his Mage character is a little bit disturbing, but that's really what happens.

The player learns the ins and outs of his character's personality, develops her speech patterns and even acts out her little physical quirks. There's nothing quite like being able to tell stories about the time your character did such and so or said this, that and the other and feeling like the character is really part of you, really an entity unto herself. That's what starting as an apprentice can do for you; that's what Storytelling is about.

So, that said, how does the player go about developing this kind of player-character relationship, and how does the Storyteller go about running chronicles that will be fun for initiates?

Accentuate the Positive

It's true that initiates just don't have as much power, knowledge or skill as even the usual beginning character. They don't have the magical oomph that other mages do, so they aren't

particularly suited to chronicles that require a lot of casting. Some characters are combat-oriented and can handle a chronicle that focuses on fights, but the majority won't be Rambo-types.

On the other hand, games that focus on the initiate's schooling can get pretty dull. Who wants to come to a game only to sit and have his character turn pages? Teacher-student relationships make for some interesting roleplaying, but there needs to be more involved in the interaction than just the transmission of information if the Storyteller expects to keep her players interested in the game.

The trick to running effective games with initiates is to focus on the initiates' particular strengths. These strengths, in their way, come directly out of the things that would generally be considered drawbacks: lack of magical power, lack of combat skills, lack of recognition in arcane circles and so on. Simply create situations that emphasize what the characters can do instead of reminding them of what they *can't* do.

Let's start with apprentices' low magic skills. Initiates usually have some command of the first level of a couple of Spheres. These first levels all allow perception-based effects, so the initiate can sense what's going on around him but not affect it directly with magic. This may seem small compared to the ability to toss fireballs around, but awareness is perhaps the single most useful and fundamental weapon in anyone's arsenal.

For example, if a character using Life • and Correspondence • realizes that a would-be attacker is sneaking up on her, she can be ready for him before he ever gets near her and then turn the surprise around on him. Forces • and Entropy • can tell a mage which wire among a bundle is most likely to short if he hits it just right with a screwdriver. Mind • helps the character pick his friends out in a crowd if he's somehow unable to see them.

In all these cases, the magic simply gives the initiate an edge in his mundane efforts — he doesn't need to send a jolt of electricity down a wire to disable an alarm system when a clipper will do just fine by itself. Additionally, these effects don't risk even a fraction of the Paradox that more flamboyant effects create. The apprentice is a step ahead of most mortal adversaries, and he's a step ahead of most arcane adversaries in the Paradox department. The initiate's sensitivity is an advantage that most mages take for granted; the wondrous expansion of the senses means that the initiate may well be aware of incoming trouble long before a more experienced mage notices it, just because the experienced mage is too jaded to rely on his superior senses.

The issue of apprentices' lack of combat skills really isn't much of a hindrance either. Most combat situations can be defused or avoided entirely by a clever group or individual, and the apprentice can use his perceptive magics to assist him. It's easy to play on a potential attacker's weak spots if the character knows what they are in the first place, and, if it comes to that, knowing someone's coming gives an apprentice that much more time to run away.

As for the apprentice's relative obscurity in mage circles, this isn't hard to see in a positive light. An unknown has much less trouble getting around, doing things and finding information than someone who's recognized everywhere he goes. If the apprentice is seeking notoriety actively, the best way to achieve it is to go get things done — he won't stay anonymous for long. In the meantime, though, wise apprentices can maneuver within their obscurity and learn all kinds of interesting things.

Finally, the apprentice's lack of experience in the arcane arts and mage society can certainly be seen as an obstacle, but even his status as a rank newbie can help him out in various situations. Often, experienced mages will assume that the only solution to a problem or situation is the one they've been told about or read about in a textbook. Some mages approach problems only from their teachers' perspective, and some don't bother to look for solutions that don't involve magic or some other specific, dogmatic technique. Apprentices, on the other hand, don't often have this kind of conditioning and are more likely to come up with innovative solutions to problems and deal with things in creative ways. These creative solutions can be more efficient, more effective and more unsettling to opponents than the run of the mill things most mages come up with.

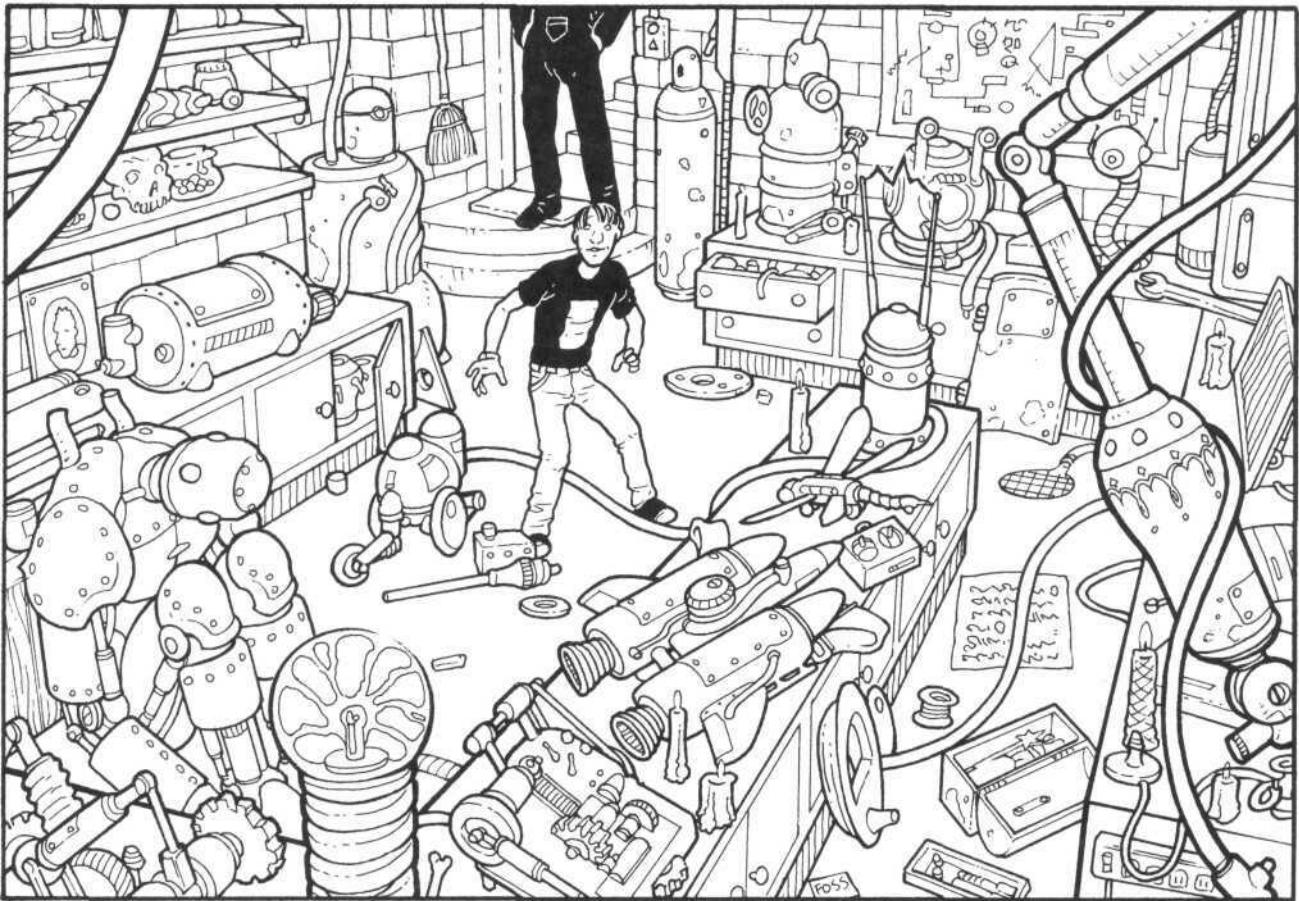
In short, when a Storyteller is sitting down to design a chronicle for a group of initiates, she should first consider the character's strengths. The second factor to consider is the players' preference in story type. Ask the players what sort of a game they'd be interested in playing — let them have input in their own story beyond simply playing in it. A few good things to let players help determine are the setting, the tone and the general overview of the chronicle. You'd be surprised at how much players appreciate this kind of involvement, and you'd be surprised at how helpful a little suggestion like "How about a pulp-style Sons of Ether game?" can be to a Storyteller.

Designing Plots

Now that you've laid out the character's abilities and strengths and set up a general outline for the game, you're ready to put the plot together. There are a few types of storyline that are, from the very beginning, right out: knock-down, drag-out fights against armies of Marauders; saving the entire known world; killing an Archmage/Antediluvian/Demon Lord/pack of Rank Five Get of Fenris Ahroun werewolves; finding the single true Necronomicon; etc. These sorts of chronicles are deadly for intermediate-level mages and dangerous for Adepts — how are apprentices supposed to survive them? The point is generally not to kill the characters.

Fortunately, there are more plots that apprentices can excel in than ones they'll botch. The actual events aren't as important as the overall type of story you choose to run. A few loose guidelines to follow when designing apprentice-oriented chronicles:

- Don't pit the characters against more than one or two Awakened antagonists who have significantly more power than they do. One Adept-level mage or one average Garou will be enough for the group to handle.
- Along those lines of thought, do feel free to give the Awakened opponent all the mortal henchmen he needs. Apprentices have all the tools they need to put the smack down on just about any normal human. If the players start to feel overwhelmed, having a Storyteller character come in and offer hints or even outright help can give them the boost they need without robbing them of the experience of dealing with the problem themselves.
- It's generally better to let the first plots revolve around discovery, mystery and investigation than to focus on arcane duels or other physical or magical elements. This time ought to be mysterious in the apprentice's life, so keeping the plot themed around wonder and discovery is a good way to emphasize that idea.
- As a corollary to the previous guideline, insist that the players not use any of their out-of-character knowledge of the other



denizens of the World of Darkness in the game. The characters are supposed to be beginners — they just don't start out knowing what a Garou is, much less the difference between a Bone Gnawer and a Child of Gaia, for example, and they shouldn't really be so cool in the face of that wraith—

- Don't be afraid to throw things in characters' paths. Let players get creative; let characters get experience. Even with all their limitations, beginning characters can do all kinds of fun and interesting things.

- Conversely, pointing out to the characters and players that there are things out there they can't deal with is an effective way to encourage them to work at their studies. Long days of poring over books or practicing katas or struggling with some tricky wiring without some compelling reason to do so beyond just acquiring knowledge is a great way to burn a character — and a player — out. Let them do what the *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* crowd does: Get into trouble, then run to the library to find out what the trouble was and how to deal with it.

- Keep the characters' mentors, if they have them, involved. Whether the involvement is just the occasional cryptic hint or constant hand-holding, the mentor should be a definite part of the students' lives. If the characters don't have mentors, keep that fact on the stage, as it were. Let them struggle a bit for knowledge, but don't let them drown — throw in some contacts or other sources of information occasionally.

- The everyday world can offer a wide variety of plot hooks for apprentices. At this stage, everything is new and interesting, and a trip to Chinatown gains all kinds of new dimensions for the newly

Awakened mage. Let the characters run into informants at the grocery store; let them have coffee with the woman they'll be chasing around the city next session (though they don't know it yet).

- Lastly, let them make mistakes. Don't send one of the characters' mentors in at the first hint of the group following a false lead. Send the cavalry in only when the characters are well and truly stumped — they'll learn more that way.

Atmosphere

Though the apprentice's world suddenly becomes wondrous and magical when he Awakens, life is not all sunshine and happy little woodland animals. The brightness of life as a mage casts some deep shadows. Because the apprentice has no real experience with or knowledge of the darker side of mage life when he first Awakens, the shadows are more terrifying than they would be to a more seasoned character.

Play up the unknown — there's certainly enough of it, and it gives the players a wide variety of possible reactions that will help define and flesh out their characters. Some characters will shrink from anything even remotely new and threatening. Others immediately become belligerent, trying to fight with anything they aren't familiar with. Still others will poke and prod at the new thing, trying to find out what makes it tick.

Besides the character opportunities, emphasis on the unknown affords the Storyteller all kinds of ways to shade her characters' world. The way new things are presented to characters can determine the mood of the game. If new experiences are almost guaranteed to leave the character bruised, bloody and



several degrees more cynical, the world takes on a gritty feel. Letting supernatural secrets lurk in every shadow gives the game a dark fantasy cast; having things just disappear into the shadows and never come out incites outright paranoia.

What you choose to keep hidden, hint at and then slowly reveal is as important to your chronicle as the things you expose immediately. And in an initiate's world, there's a lot more that's unfamiliar than there is that's familiar. Even the familiar sometimes seems strange and distressing—

Awarding Experience

An apprentice's learning curve is steep. Everything he does, basically, sends him leaping forward in his education and leaves his old self behind. The rules for awarding experience reflect this learning curve. Because improving the character's stats is based upon his existing number of dots, and because apprentice characters don't have a whole lot of dots to start with, characters can buy up their abilities and Spheres quite quickly.

But letting characters just skim right out of their apprenticeships somehow defeats the purpose of playing an initiate character in the first place. The point is to actually go through the learning process and roleplay the apprenticeship, not rack up as many experience points as possible in order to get more power.

To that end, Storytellers might want to consider awarding fewer experience points at the end of each game session in order to slow the accumulation a bit. Another option is for the Storyteller to put a moratorium on any experience expenditure beyond a certain point until the character has been in play for a given amount of time. Or, for yet another alternative, the Storyteller

can completely disallow increases in areas like Spheres or Arete until the character has been around for a certain amount of time, completed a certain course of training in the game or performed a certain activity.

However, Storytellers should be careful to allow the players and characters to grow. Players tend to get annoyed if their characters never seem to get anywhere, and the story can stagnate if nothing ever changes. Also, letting experience pile up too high leads to huge leaps in power level that can unbalance your game. The trick, as we've pointed out before, is achieving balance — balance between stretching the apprentice period out long enough to be fully enjoyed and letting the character advance enough to keep things interesting.

One of the better half-way measures is to award normal experience, but to track it individually on each trait and to allow a player to place only one point towards each trait used in a given session. That way, the player must consistently focus on the apprentice's abilities over several games in order to improve in various traits.

It's wise for the Storyteller to keep in good contact with her players about this particular issue — instead of waiting until half the players drop because they're bored. Ask them how they're feeling about the chronicle in general. Ask them what they'd like to do next or where they think their characters are going. Get as much feedback as possible — after all, it's as much the players' game as it is the Storyteller's, if not more so.

Keeping an open line of communication between Storyteller and players is a good idea for any chronicle, apprentice-oriented or not. Let the players guide the game, but don't let them drag it and force it into something you won't enjoy running!

That's about it — go git 'em.



Still Stuck?

If all of that didn't give you enough ideas, here are a few ready-made apprentice chronicles. Just add players, characters, dice, and a few Storyteller characters, stir, bake and *viola!* — instant game.

Those Meddling Kids: The apprentices' teacher sends them off to investigate some reports of odd events in a fairly remote or self-contained area. Alternatively, they just hear rumors that are, of course, specifically designed to get their attention. They find a series of clues, have a series of spooky or tense encounters, eventually figure out what's really motivating the crime or causing the events and then capture the ringleader and unmask him in front of their mentors. He would have gotten away with it, too..

Hey, Wasn't That Madonna? The characters realize that they've been seeing the same person almost everywhere they go. This particular hook can lead just about anywhere: for one, the familiar face can be someone following them in preparation for an attack or corruption attempt. Or the person could be one (or more) of the Main Bad Guy's legion of similar-looking henchmen, sent to spy on the characters' attempts to take down the MBG. Or the person could really be Madonna, but when the group runs after her, they get lost in the inner city, the sewer systems (though what Madonna would be doing there is something of a mystery in itself) or an enormous, disorienting building (maybe a magical funhouse-type trap). This story is good for getting characters familiar with their setting, especially if it's in a city, and setting a somewhat paranoid mood.

King's Pawn Three: Some high muckety-muck in the Traditions sends the group on some nebulous mission. Not knowing any better (or not wanting to refuse the muckety-muck), the characters undertake it, but when they get where they're going they discover that they're in way over their heads. As a matter of fact, it kind of seems like a situation designed to get rid of them... now they have to get themselves out of the immediate danger and figure out what's going on plus figure out what's so special about them that would lead a muckety-muck to want them out of the way. This is a great way to showcase the Traditions and the politics involved in being a Tradition mage.

Classic Lovecraft: The characters come across a tablet with some sinister-looking inscriptions on it. They take it someplace where they can study it, or they copy the inscription and take that away; when they've deciphered the scribbles, they realize that it's an open invitation for something unspeakable to come have this plane of existence for dinner. The characters have to decide what to do with the tablet, figure out who put it where they could find it and what to do about *that* and avoid triggering the spell in the first place—all before suppertime. This particular plot is a beautiful vehicle for a dark, classically horrific world and allows the Storyteller and players alike to get in on some good suspense and drama scenes.

These stories should last you several game sessions—time enough for you to come up with some ideas of your own.



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Appendix: By the Numbers



So, now you know what it is to be a mage. An easy thing? No, it is not, and no one ever said it would be. Magic has its price, and like it or not, you will have to pay when the collector comes. If you're smart, though, you won't have to pay anything that you can't handle. If you're dumb, you'll be left with a debt, or dead, or worse. Don't be a fool, and you'll survive.

If you've gotten this far, then I would guess that you've read to the end of this book. Good. Remember it. Don't forget it. Refer to it when you need it. Follow this advice and you might live a while. Ignore it, and you might find yourself in a situation you don't know how to get out of. Then again, this might all be stuff you know.

If you think that, then I advise you to take a step back and humble yourself. You don't know everything. Even if you've read every word and sentence in this book, you're far from knowing it all. But don't fret. You aren't supposed to know it all yet. That's why you're an apprentice, so you can learn it.

Take the time that you have, learn what you can. Grow. Understand. Appreciate. Your days as an apprentice will be short, and you'll find yourself missing them one day, for compared to the rest of your existence, they're actually pretty simple days. Take them for what they are, and remember, you always have someone, even if it's just me through this book.

That said, I wish you the best for survival.

Honorable

Sir Lawrence White

Lee Ann closed the book and placed it quietly on the table. No one said a word. They simply looked first to each other, and then to Sir Lawrence.

"You wrote this?" Jessa said at last.

Sir Lawrence shook his head.

"No, we all did," he said. "We, and others like us. I have about 200 copies of it in my car. I want it in the hands of every street level apprentice from here to Timbuktu if possible."

Dent looked doubtful, but it was Ryan who spoke up.

"Why do I get the feeling that there are certain mages who wouldn't like this? Like, I don't know, say, the Council?"

Sir Lawrence smiled.

"You're right, they probably would not. But then again, who said they were right? Last I heard, reality was up for grabs."

"It could get us into a lot of trouble," Marcus said. "But it could also help prevent a lot of trouble. I'm all for passing them along, as long as we're careful." He looked to Dent.

Dent nodded. "Useful, especially since I know, no offense Jessa, that a lot of what the Hollow Ones and other Orphans pass around is not always accurate. We have to take care on where it gets passed to, but yes, I agree."

Sir Lawrence looked around.

"Then we all agree?" he said. There were nods all around. They stood in their turn, dinner long since finished and the bill paid long before they arrived. They would follow Sir Lawrence to his car to collect the small books that he offered to them, then to hand to new mages as they found them.

As they walked out, Lee Ann lingered, looking at Sir Lawrence for a moment.

"Why?" she asked. "You said you weren't going to do it."

Sir Lawrence frowned.

"Because, unfortunately, some dreams do come true."

A Few Simple Rotes



Apprentices are hard-pressed to manage anything more than a dot in most Spheres, so they're generally limited to sensory effects. However, that is far from a useless talent.

Alarm System (Life •, Correspondence •)

The best protection against being interrupted is knowing whether there's anyone out there to interrupt you. This Rote allows the student to scan her immediate area for life patterns. It's also an excellent practice exercise — masters often ask their students to scan their areas, identify any life patterns by species and then repeat the scan every 10 minutes, making a note of which life forms have left and which new ones have entered.

[Life • allows the student to sense and identify life forms, Correspondence • allows her to sense the area around her.]

Deadaim (Entropy •, Forces •, Optional Life •)

Even the simplest shot can be botched, let's face it. I learned real quick, though, that I can lessen the chances of that happening. If I open myself, just relax a little when I aim, and focus on what I want to hit and not the need to hit it, I can hit anything. I wouldn't suggest this for trick shots, but for straightforward firefights, this can come in real handy, and make it almost effortless to shoot someone. Not that I'm promoting killing, quite the contrary, but we all do as we must. (Dent, Akashic Brotherhood)

This Rote enables the mage to determine the success of the shot he is aiming, and to readjust in the aiming process.

[In game terms, the Rote is performed in the same turn that the character aims, and successes on his Arete roll detract from his difficulty one for one. Foci are the ranged weapons used.]

Dontcme (Correspondence •, Entropy ••)

Lee Ann taught me this back when I was in the Brat Pack. I couldn't hide in a dark room if I were wearing all black. Lee Ann, on the other hand, can walk in nude to a priest's convention and not be noticed. I don't know why she ever needed to use this, but she said it's been useful to her. It's been useful to me, since sometimes it's been the only way I haven't gotten caught. When I wanted to hide, or not be followed, I would just close my eyes and whisper three times "Don't See Me." It worked pretty well. It certainly made it hard enough to follow or find me. (Jessa, Hollow One)

Dontcme aids a young mage in hiding from those who are not so friendly, and helps keep the mage from being followed if spotted. This is good for the Apprentice who does NOT have Arcane. Foci for this Rote include such items as sunglasses, capes or cloaks, to hand-held cloaking devices, or in the case of Lee Ann and some Hollow Ones, chanting "Don't see me, don't see me."

[The mage manages to bend spatial perceptions around himself briefly. Successes are split between effect and duration, with effect levels giving temporary effective levels of Arcane.]

Followme (Correspondence •, Mind ••)

So, I have this problem. You see, people can't find me. That's real good when I'm looking to strike at the Technos and don't want to be found out. That's real bad when I'm needing allies to meet me to help. So, I came up with this early on, as a way to make sure my friends can always find me. When I know I'm supposed to meet them, I send out a thought to them. If I'm on the move, I send it out repeatedly, until we meet. They get the thought, and this sense of where I am. I had to make the thought simple though, so I would just say "Follow me," and they would. I

focused through my mood crystal because I always have it on, I knew they would always be drawn to it by the magic. (Lee Ann, Cult of Ecstasy)

What's an apprentice to do when her friends are across town and she's naturally unobtrusive? This simple spell enables a young mage to give friends a mental homing beacon to her whereabouts. This is very good for the apprentice who has Arcane and needs friends to be able to find her. Foci for this can be anything from a pager or cell phone to a simple stone, depending on the Tradition and style of mage.

[Though a mage can normally remove his Arcane, this helps to focus the attention of others to the mage. Using Correspondence 1, the caster centers on his own physical space. The Mind Effect implants an empathetic "pull."]

Trickshot (Correspondence •, Entropy •, Forces •, Mind •)

So, you have to be very careful with this Rote. If the tricks are too impossible and someone sees, it's "Hello, reality, fuck me now." Yep, screw this up, and you can bend over. Get it right, and you can get yourself out of really tight spots. My specialty with this is a gun, but any weapon you shoot or throw will do. I just open my mind to what is around me, and process it through. When I'm done, I know exactly where to shoot to get that hard-to-hit target. All in all, it only takes me about a split-second to do. I suggest lots of practice, though. (Ryan, Virtual Adept)

This Rote allows a mage to calculate nearly impossible shots (trick shots) with maximum efficiency and a minimum of mistakes. Foci for this include a gun or any ranged or thrown weapon. At higher levels, the mage can begin to actually perform impossible trick shots, but at lower levels, it only allows him to attempt nearly impossible ones at a lesser difficulty per success on his Arete roll.

[This conjunctional Effect lets a mage figure out the necessary angles and forces to judge a particularly difficult shot. Successes gained on the Effect roll subtract from the difficulty of the next aimed shot, up to a -3 modifier.]

No-Doz (Any •)

This Rote is designed for the student who burns way too much midnight oil. When the initiate gets almost too tired to stay awake any more, she opens her senses. She becomes hyper-aware of what's going on around her, and it brings her back to her studies or other activities.

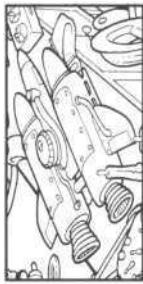
[The Rote can be done with the first level of any Sphere. The idea is that the greater sensory input will refresh the student and give her something to focus on besides being tired. If the Storyteller deems it appropriate, the player can choose one Sphere that works best for his character. The Storyteller can also require that this Rote be done with a Sphere specific to the character's situation.]

Positive Thinking (Mind •)

The mage can enter a trancelike state or dream and empower himself. He reaches small epiphanies through insight into current situations, or solve inner conflicts and dilemmas. He can also prep himself to become calm, and thus be harder to fluster, this would usually give him bonuses to Willpower rolls, or raise the difficulty of someone trying to intimidate or trick him. Foci for this Rote are either the trances and mantras, or sometimes a foci crystal or similar object. Herb pillows are excellent foci for those who seek to perform this Rote while they dream.

[With a successful Effect roll, the mage can get insight into a current problem or stumper. Often, this is done meditatively as an extended effect. In game terms, the mage may uncover new insights to help solve a problem in studies or set forth by a mentor.]

Some Common Paradoxes



Apprentices just don't have the torque to send Paradox haring off in totally unique directions. Still, the occasional bit of Paradoxical whimsy is nigh-unavoidable for a mage. An apprentice could run afoul of any of the following manifestations:

Paradox Spirits: Low-level Effects aren't particularly egregious, so spirits summoned by such backlashes tend to have only first and second dot powers. A Paradox spirit doesn't go easy on an apprentice just because she's new, though. In general, a Paradox spirit is more likely to try to teach the apprentice a lesson than to summarily pass executive judgment.

Paradox Realms: What, are you kidding? Apprentices just don't open rifts in reality. As a general rule, an apprentice mage — one who has less than four dots of Spheres, and a Willpower of

five or less — will never open a Paradox Realm, just because of the weakness of the magic. On the other hand, the apprentice could get dragged along with someone else.

Paradox Effects: Apprentices get low-key effects, in keeping with their magical styles. However, given that the apprentice still probably has firm ties to his normal life, this can be problematic. *You had your hair dyed blue? That's against our dress code here...* When building Paradox Effects for apprentices, don't just work from the idea of "what sort of weird effect could inconvenience the character now?" Paradox is a wonderful way to explore characterization. Give the apprentice a nagging little flaw that gets in the way of normal relations, and then play it up. See how the apprentice reacts. If the apprentice can't handle a little Paradox, he's got a lot to learn before he takes on the real thing as a full-on mage.

Running an Apprentice Game



With all the guidelines in this book, you should have no trouble coming up with ideas for apprentices. The full life of professionalism, school, family and magical study makes for a pretty hectic schedule! There's no dearth of opportunity. Playing an apprentice game is also a great break from the world-shattering powers common to many other Storyteller games. Plus, it's a wonderful way to build a character from the very bottom, taking the opportunity to explore every step to Ascension.

So how does one build an apprentice-level character? It's just like a mage, but with fewer dots.

Attributes: Apprentices are slightly better than the ruck and run of mortality, but they have a ways to go to develop their full potential. Attributes start at 6/5/3.

Abilities: The typical apprentice has had a few craft abilities drilled into his head, just to work a modicum of magic. Abilities start at 12/8/5.

Backgrounds: An apprentice has 5 Backgrounds, but he will likely get more as he joins up with the mage community. Most apprentices should have at least one dot in Mentor and Avatar.

Arete: Build your apprentice with Arete 1. That's it.

Willpower: Start with a Willpower of 3. Improvements cost 1 freebie point each.

Spheres: The apprentice has two Spheres: the primary Sphere, and a personal interest Sphere. Additional Spheres add on later.

Freebie Points: Take 18 (not 15) freebie points and spend them as usual, but do not raise Arete.

Experience: This is how your apprentice grows! As the character improves, spend experience just like a regular magus. Simple!

Sleeper Apprentices

For a *real* challenge, you might try taking a normal Sleeper and suddenly Awakening him. Try this on for size....

Attributes: Sleepers have Attributes at 6/4/3.

Abilities: Sleeper Abilities start at 11/7/4.

Backgrounds: The Sleeper gets 5 Backgrounds, most likely related to mortal relatives and society.

Arete: If you're starting with a true Sleeper, you have no Arete. If you just Awakened, you have an Arete of 1.

Willpower: Start with a Willpower of 3. Improvements cost 1 freebie point each.

Spheres: No Spheres yet — you just woke up! Get a mentor.

Freebie Points: Take your standard 21 freebie points. Spend 15, and save the other six points for mage specific advantages when you Awaken. If you're already Awake, go ahead and spend them all. Remember, don't raise Arete above 1 at this time.

Merits and Flaws

A couple of specific problems can plague apprentices during their formative years. Here are a few ideas.

Hollow Soul(1 point Merit)

No matter how you try, the ingraining of your Tradition just doesn't seem to "take" with a special focus. You don't have any particular emphasis on the Spheres. Nothing's particularly *hard* (assuming that you're not Sphere Inept), but nothing's exactly especially *easy*, either.

Despite a Tradition, Convention or Craft affiliation, you have no specialty Sphere. You place a dot in your group's specialty Sphere as normal during character creation, since your mentor focuses on it, but you pay experience costs for further improvement like a Hollow One or Orphan.

Pushy Avatar (2 point Merit)

Your damn Avatar just won't leave you alone! No matter how much you try to block it out, it keeps forcing you onward, making you examine your progress and shoving you into difficult situations.

This is a *good* thing, though. Your constant process of self-examination means that you are more likely to get through Seekings, as you are constantly faced with your own inner tur-

moil. You are pushed to become a mage and to embrace magic, even if you try to ignore it. Once during each Seeking that you undergo, you may reroll one failed roll completely.

Cross-Training (5 point Merit)

You've studied under multiple mentors, and you learned a little bit from each. Though you tend to follow one Tradition, Convention or Disparate way of magic, you picked up enough tricks to use one other group's tools to a certain degree.

In game terms, one of your Spheres can be cross-trained, allowing you to use foci and Effects that would normally be the province of a different group. For instance, if you are a Hermetic mage who cross-trained with the Virtual Adepts, you might be able to use computers for Correspondence Effects, so that you can have your spells "reach out and touch someone." You must still have the proper skills to use the particular foci, though.

Cross-training does not prevent you from using your normal Tradition/Convention/Craft foci and Effects with your chosen Sphere. However, you can only choose to cross-train within the same group; if you follow a Tradition, you can only cross-train with another Tradition, and so on. (Orphans can cross-train with any one group.)

Blended Technique (7 point Merit)

Instead of taking a particular viewpoint as dogma, you've melded together a set of variable techniques and forms as your own special way of doing magic. Better still, you're flexible — you take on new bits and pieces all the time. When someone shows you a way to do something, you just shrug and add it to your repertoire.

Instead of being limited to a particular focus for each Effect that you want to do, you can learn to use other foci simply by watching a different mage. If you watch an Akashic Brother use *Do* as a focus for his magic — and he explains what he's doing — you can learn to do it, too). If a Verbena then shows you how blood magic leads to healing, you can pick that up. You're the quintessential Orphan: You use every hodge-podge piece of technique that you find.

Rogue Apprentice (1 point Flaw)

You started training with a particular Tradition, but you left before you finished your apprenticeship. Although you didn't betray and steal all of their secrets, they still have a particularly painful spot in their collective hearts for you.

You probably aren't Branded, since you are still just an apprentice and therefore salvageable. However, you've already screwed up in the eyes of one Tradition. All of your social difficulties with your former Tradition suffer a +2 difficulty modifier. You can expect to never see training in that Tradition again; better find your own technique.

Nephantic Taint (3 point Flaw)

Somewhere early in your training, you studied a bit with a generous and helpful master. Turns out he had a reason for being such a nice guy.

Although you didn't fall to the Lost Path and your Avatar is still (hopefully) untainted, you wound up learning a bit at the hands/feet/tentacles/whatever of a Nephandus. This colors all of your magic; your Resonance tends to flavor with destructive, primordial effects. You can't learn Qliphothic Entropy (you're not truly one of the Fallen), but the distinction is lost on most mages. You may have trouble finding a new mentor, and you will always be suspect.

Fresh Meat (4 point Flaw)

You just Awakened, and you have managed to pull off a little bit of magic. Darn it, though, the other supernaturals of your home town have decided that you would make the best ally... or puppet.

Some sort of supernatural creature wants to control you and exert a hold over your magical skills. For some reason, your mentor (if any) is unable to prevent this being's influence. Your Storyteller will make up the creature and define its powers, goals, and means of screwing with you.

Alaskan Bush Pilot

Quote: See that patch of scrub? That's where I'll set you down. I'll be back with the mail in 10 days, and if you have anything to send out to Fairbanks or Anchorage, you can give it to me then. No, ignore that dial. It's not hooked up to anything.

Prelude: You always loved to tinker with things when you were a kid. You started with Legos and Lincoln Logs and eventually moved on to your bicycle. Every night, you'd take it apart, clean it, paint it and maybe tweak the chain a little or play with the speedometer you put on it when you were six. Then you'd put it back together, ready for another trip to the tiny Michigan elementary school you attended.

When you were in the seventh grade, you had to do a report on small aircraft. That did it—you were hooked. The most interesting things you found were the books and diagrams of older planes, the kind built before any advanced electronic devices were available. That's the real way to fly, you thought—by the pilot's skill, his dexterity, his ability to keep his plane in good repair and the integrity of the plane itself.



Your parents moved to Alaska when you were in high school, and you got the chance to follow your dream. You learned to fly, bought your first plane when you were 21, and you've worked as a bush pilot ever since. Your plane, named after your mother, reflects your bare-bones philosophy: It's a vintage craft with nothing electronic in it at all, just analog dials, manual steering and basic gauges. You've learned in the 15 years since you first started flying how to tinker with her and make the archaic instruments work better than any electronics you've seen. You know when there's a problem, and you know which wire needs to be tweaked to fix it.

Lately you've been ferrying a biologist around. The old doc is a bit eccentric for sure, but he seems to understand your mechanical intuition, and the two of you have long, involved conversations on the way to and from his research stations. He told you about Awak-

ening, and he's promised to start teaching you more when he comes back from his latest wolf study. Until then, you're content to fly your plane and tinker with it some more.

Concept: You're a little old for this apprentice stuff, but hey—you get to learn more about gauges, gears and other mechanical systems. You're always willing to take a chance, whether it's an iffy landing or a snowstorm, and this isn't too much different. You know you can handle it. As long as you get to keep flying and keep learning, you're happy.

Roleplaying Hints: The words that best describe you are confident, inquisitive and steady. You're always up for an adventure, partly because you know you can do just about anything with your little plane, partly because there's always something out there you haven't done yet and you want to do it all. Come up with innovative ideas for your machine that might seem crackpot to other people, then implement them and watch your detractors squirm. And all these young pilots and their gadgets? Feh. You're a real pilot. But you don't really dislike them—some might be willing to try flying for real.

Magic: As of yet, you don't have much. You know you understand how the wiring works on your craft, but there's not much you can do to change it or affect it short of getting in there with your toolbox. If Doc Sanders is right, though, you should be able to fix that light that just goes on randomly soon.

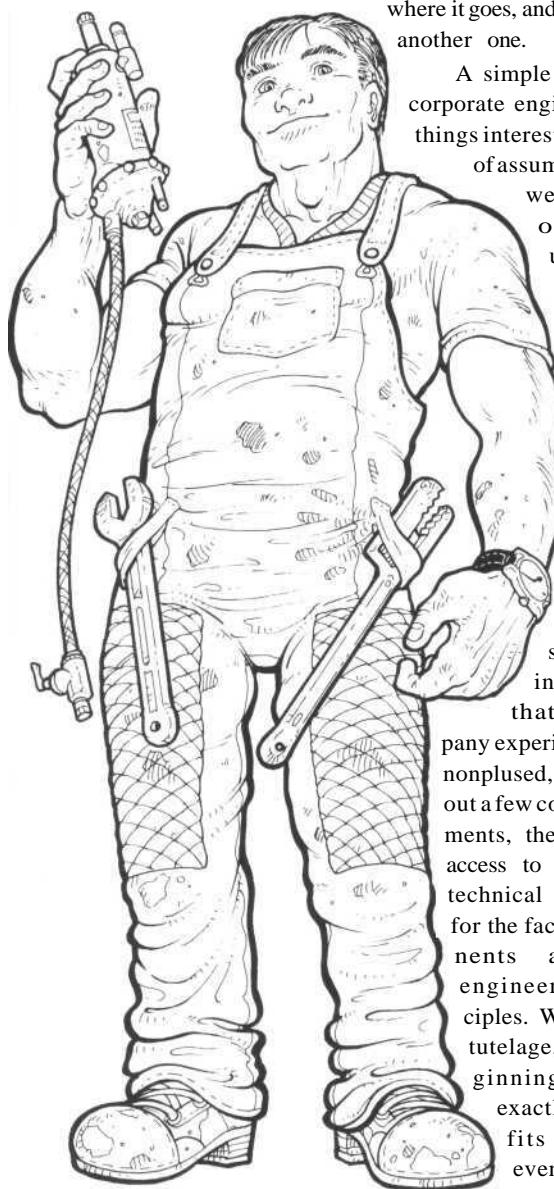
Equipment: Vintage small plane, fleece-lined leather jacket, maps, wrench, ratchet, pliers

Industry Worker

Quote: Nah, it's not too technical. You just have to machine the piece on a bevel, then give it a bit of an interior curvature so that it rests properly on the housing. When you do it a few hundred times a day, you get pretty good at it.

Prelude: Despite appearances and stereotypes, you're far from dumb. You just prefer a simple life. While everyone else is running around hectically and trying to find high-tech solutions to the same old problems, you live in a slower, older world. You even have a degree in machining, and you take pleasure and pride in simple, handmade work.

After a few years at the factory, you'd served in several capacities. You'd machined various parts, tinkered with the equipment and helped to improve the efficiency of various operations. It's gotten so that you're an old hand at the job; you know the parts inside and out. Just by looking at a chunk of metal, you can tell what it does, where it goes, and how to make another one.





A simple chat with a corporate engineer turned things interesting. Instead of assuming that you were just another uneducated drill pusher, he actually asked some questions about what you do. You gave him straight answers, and told him about some of the inefficiencies that the company experienced. A bit nonplused, he pointed out a few counter-arguments, then gave you access to a bunch of technical schematics for the factory components and their engineering principles. With a bit of tutelage, you're beginning to see exactly how it all fits together, even when it's

just a hypothetical piece in your mind's eye. Somewhere in there is a machine of perfect efficiency. You plan to make it real.

Concept: Simple crafts and tools are your real passion, although you are low-key even about the things that you love. Some might call you "bear" due to your solid build and slow demeanor, but you've a sharp mind and keen insight. Though physically imposing, you're pacifistic at heart. It's when you're working in smudged overalls with various hand tools in assorted pockets that you're content.

Roleplaying Hints: If people got along as well as perfectly tooled machine parts, the world would run with absolute smoothness. In hopes of capturing that elegance, you do things easily, smoothly and with simplicity. Why make things more complex than they have to be? You're calm and compassionate, always able to fit in like a perfect cog.

Magic: The gears and pistons and valves and screws of machinery are so familiar to you that you can name every one of them and build them from memory. With just a glance, you can tell what an object does and how it's built, and whether it's flawed. A little work lets you fix it up as good as — or better than — new. Material things are your purview, but your generous soul may expand to encompass the people and feelings around you as well once you start to reach out.

Equipment: Dirty overalls, spanner, wrench, complex and unrecognizable pump part

Photographer

Quote: *Shhh... don't move. Sit still, and we'll catch them eating that antelope. Wolves know when they're being watched, and they don't like it much. These guys haven't noticed us yet, though.*

Prelude: You always had a feel for the perfect shot. From the time you got your first Polaroid camera in the '80s, you were the quintessential shutterbug, taking pictures of your cats, your friends, the creek behind your house, everything. Some of the shots were posed, but you liked the candids better — they just seemed to capture the life behind the smiles.

Soon you were using a much nicer camera and developing your pictures in the laundry room. You received a lot of attention from your teachers in school, who all said that you had a singularly compassionate eye and told you that

you might want to do this sort of thing for a living. You took their advice and went to work for a little nature magazine right out of high school.

The magazine sent you on a dream shoot — they sent you and a helper to Kenya. They said that maybe you could bring some life into the old standby photo safari. You got some neat shots the first week you were there, but then you met an ancient Kenyan woman. She told you what you had always known, somewhere inside: The reason your pictures are so good is because you can see what's in your subjects' hearts. You don't always

shoot for the image, you shoot for the spirit, and it shows up in the photos.

Now you're practicing seeing that spirit every day. The viewfinder brings everything into focus, and your pictures just get better



and better under your teacher's watchful eye.

Concept: You have a real love for the animals and people you photograph. It shows in your pictures, besides the fact that you choose subjects based on their spirits — like your teachers said, you have a compassionate eye. You want to show the world what kind of beauty there is out there, and you know you can do it with your camera. Your magic is just the thing to help you do that — and it doesn't hurt that no one thinks twice about the fact that you look at just about everything through your viewfinder.

Roleplaying Hints: Happy and adventuresome, you're usually well-liked. There's real beauty and strength out there, and you want to share. Smile a lot, and point out neat scenes or little flowers that catch your eye. The world is a visual place for you — rely on your eyes and your intuition to let you in on what's going on.

Magic: Things seem so much clearer through the lens of your camera. You can't affect scenes yet, but once you look through that little window, you see what's really there. You can even get a sense of what your subjects are feeling and what they're about to do, but that may be a product of your photographer's sense rather than magic.

Equipment: Pentax camera, several different speed films, lenses, water bottle, cargo vest, press credentials

MAGE			
The Ascension™		Tradition: Orphan	
Name: Ben Stuart	Nature: Ben Stuart	Essence: Dynamic	Mentor: Cabal
Player:	Character:		
Abilities			
Physical		Social	
Strength: ●●○○○	Charisma: ○○○○○	Perception: Uncanny	Wisdom: ○○○○○
Dexterity: ●●○○○	Manipulation: ○○○○○	Intelligence: ○○○○○	
Stamina: ●●○○○	Appearance: ○○○○○	Wits: ○○○○○	
Abilities			
Talents		Skills	
Awareness: ●●○○○	Do: ○○○○○	Computer: ○○○○○	
Athletics: ○○○○○	Drive: ○○○○○	Cosmology: ○○○○○	
Brawl: ○○○○○	Etiquette: ○○○○○	Culture: ○●○○○	
Dodge: ○○○○○	Firearms: ○○○○○	Enigmas: ○○○○○	
Expression: Photography: ●●○○○	Leadership: ○○○○○	Investigation: ○○○○○	
Instruction: ○○○○○	Meditation: ○○○○○	Law: ○○○○○	
Intuition: ●●○○○	Melee: ○○○○○	Linguistics: ○●○○○	
Intimidation: ○○○○○	Research: ○○○○○	Lore: ○○○○○	
Streetwise: ○○○○○	Stealth: ○○○○○	Medicine: ○○○○○	
Subterfuge: ○○○○○	Survival: ○○○○○	Occult: ○○○○○	
	Technology: ○○○○○	Science: ○○○○○	
Spells			
Correspondence: ○○○○○	Life: ○○○○○	Prime: ○○○○○	
Entropy: ○○○○○	Mind: ○○○○○	Spirit: ○●○○○	
Forces: ○○○○○	Matter: ○○○○○	Time: ○○○○○	
Advantages			
Backgrounds		Arete	
Avatar: ●○○○○	Willpower: ○○○○○	Bruised: 0 □	
Influence: ○○○○○	Quintessence: ○○○○○	Blinded: -1 □	
Mentor: ○○○○○	Paradox: ○○○○○	Injured: -1 □	
Resources: ○○○○○		Wounded: -2 □	
Talisman: ○○○○○		Mauled: -2 □	
Combat		Health	
Weapon:	Difficulty:	Bruised: 0 □	
	Damage:	Blinded: -1 □	
		Injured: -1 □	
		Wounded: -2 □	
		Mauled: -2 □	
		Incapacitated: 0 □	
Experience:			

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All around, a new world blossoms. One moment you had a dreary everyday life. The next, you discovered the wonder of a universe shaped at your whim. Better be careful, though; with incredible power comes incalculable danger. The Traditions, the Technocracy, even the vampires, ghosts and werewolves all want a piece of you. If you're going to survive and learn to use your power, you'd better listen up. Time for the hard road, apprentice.

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